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SEN provision and teacher training in Oman : a conceptual and policy disjunction

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SEN Provision and Teacher Training in Oman: a Conceptual and Policy Disjunction?

Mona F. Al Said

2005

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the PhD degree at Department of Education and Professional Studies King's College London, University of London, May 2005.

BIBL. LONDIN. UKIM

ABSTRACT

This study is located in the Gulf state of Oman, where there has been rapid change in educational policy and practice over a relatively short period. The study focuses on special educational needs (SEN) in Oman, how these are currently constructed and how reflected, or not, in teacher training provision. The study provides an overview of current SEN provision as well as "need" in Oman. It explores some of the current dominant discourses in the area, with a focus on the tensions between powerful medicalized models of SEN as well as calls for inclusion and the recognition of human rights in education.

Drawing on a broadly ethnographic approach, this research is a mixed methods analysis of the ways in which SENs are theoretically understood and constructed by key policy-makers and teacher education practitioners. Three sets of data were collected and analysed: interviews with educational professionals; interviews with senior teacher trainers, and indicative case studies of provision in the three Omani special schools. The thesis focuses on a critical exploration of the dominant ways SEN provision are constructed and deployed. These discursive perspectives are then related to aspects of policy and practice.

The study suggests that the education policy-making system in Oman may sometimes concentrate power in such a manner as to restrict the development of SEN provision. Simultaneously, institutional and cultural values and practices may discourage challenge to the status quo. Findings suggest that there is a gap between dominant concepts of SEN

and the education policies currently in place in Oman – a disjunction which is a function of the dominant power technology. However, it is argued that there are conceptual and pragmatic difficulties in merely inserting practices and ideas from elsewhere that may not be sensitive to the specificities in Oman.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all those with special educational needs in Oman

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The list of people who have helped in the production of this thesis is considerable: if any are left out, I ask them to forgive a grateful, though sometimes forgetful, woman.

I thank my two supervisors, Dr Maguire and Dr Abbott for their considerable support and invaluable expert criticism.

I thank all those involved directly in the research – those interviewed and those who answered the questionnaires – and those who generally made time for me in their busy and demanding schedules. I thank the Omani Ministries of Higher Education, Education and Social Development and the teacher training colleges for their openness and swift responses to my enquiries, and Sultan Qaboos University for its sponsorship and faith in my research.

I thank my father and mother for their continuous support. Without my father's fascinating insights and my mother's unflagging encouragement I could not have completed this research.

And my warmest thanks – and apologies – to my two sons, Shihab and Sultan, who have had to put up with a distracted and frequently exhausted mother. Without their love, support and inspiration I would never have written a word.

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INTRODUCTION

This research aims to illuminate a unique and little known environment – the Omani provision of special educational needs (SEN) and the associated teacher training. In doing so it will also, hopefully, open a window on a Gulf state and give a voice to a range of education professionals with much to say.

The research may not suggest definitive answers to the problems surrounding SEN provision in Oman, but does seek to develop a sensitivity to and promote enquiry in the context of Omani pedagogy. The aim is to examine and communicate as objectively as possible some insights into this specific field and unique setting.

> Que c'est que savoir et ignorer, qui doit être le but de l'étude. (Montaigne, 1972: 230)

The aim could be condensed as "*le but de l'étude*" in a wider generative sense, though specifically and particularly within the context of Oman and Omani SEN provision. However, the context is not an end but rather a means. This study of a specific educational environment, the practices and philosophies constraining it and the mechanisms or technologies of power maintaining it, may be of use to wider educational research and thought by distilling and grounding the discursive abstractions of the respondents and relevant literature. The findings are offered as both a detailed account of a moment in time in Oman and, perhaps more importantly, of the development and passage of educational ideas more generally.

In avoiding any temptation to suggest that there is a global hierarchy of adequacy in provision – or indeed hierarchies of any useful kind (Guérin, 1982) – the aim here is to profile Omani SEN policy and practice at the beginning of the 21st century, and to argue that SEN provision can all too frequently only be as adequate as the dominant perceptions of educational bureaucrats and teacher trainers. If education in Oman perhaps has a narrower agenda than elsewhere, then lessons may be learnt from this research which might be usefully applied not only in similar settings, but anywhere teaching is constrained by bureaucracy. Perhaps an awareness of the dangers of what Montaigne describes as the boundaries of knowledge – *c'est que savoir et ignorer* – can therefore be more keenly appreciated.

Sometimes we "know and ignore" the wrong things; sometimes a student may be known as one thing, but what they really are, is ignored. SEN is just another label of knowing: it may refer to physical difference or disability, to mental or emotional difference or disability, or to those students with extraordinary abilities. But this research suggests labels are of limited use, especially psychomedicalized labels. A disability that leads to SEN includes any characteristic which may, in the context of mainstream standardized education, slow a student's educational progress, damage potential or atrophy educational or social skills. The SEN educationalists "know" begins to vanish away as it takes on an almost universal educational connotation of requiring some level of extra help. In this perspective, the aims of education are contestable (Winch and Gingell, 1999): is education a process of knowing exactly the limits of education, and the commodification

of pupils; is it to standardize pupils; to make them "fit" better the society in which they live?

This research explores the ways in which education policy-makers and teacher trainers in Oman construct SEN. The study examines how these constructions impact on educational and policy related discourses, analysing the disjunctions between conceptions and policy outcomes. There is also an attempt to explain this gap, and therefore to offer an analysis of the *discourses* of education policy-makers, educationalists and teacher trainers, to explore the "tone" of knowing and ignoring in which such people communicate and generate education policy. The interviews with policy-makers and bureaucrats (chapter 4), an account of the three special schools in Oman (chapter 5) and the detailed qualitative analysis of the key respondents in teacher training (chapters 6, 7 and 8) explore how attitudes and perspectives feed into policies at the micro and macro levels, as well as identifying – as clearly as possible with these research instruments – Omani policy towards teacher education and SEN. An approach such as this offers a snapshot of the current policy and training structures and supporting discourses, examining how Oman is currently tackling very new and – in terms of an Arab, Muslim culture – unusual ideas: SEN provision brings with it concepts Omani education professionals and bureaucrats may find difficult to assimilate. Helping such assimilation is therefore important, and this research offers a suggestion for future ways of developing education policy and meeting needs – a springboard for further research and policy development.

By mapping the "tone" of education policy-makers, educationalists and teacher trainers, by identifying the core aim of the education process in Oman, this research may help the Omani education community, within the field of SEN and beyond it, usefully build an element of reflexivity. Part of this push to greater self-awareness may mean accessing Westernized educational literature, yet this access need not be negative in the context of professional growth. Currently, teachers in Omani state schools are often unaware of the nuances of SEN which exist in all classrooms. This unawareness could be a contributory factor in many school students dropping out partially or completely, learning more slowly and being less well-prepared for the swiftly-changing and aggressive job market, being placed in special schools or classed as "ineducable". The more Omani teachers know, the more they seek to know, the better served will be the most vulnerable students.

Knowing need not be labelling; early identification of SEN could help alleviate or even solve some tensions in Omani provision. As part of this process, student teachers reading this research may build a better picture of the implications of SEN for school students, parents and themselves. The need to recognize, understand and meet SENs is a recent addition to Omani and Arab educational practice. Therefore mapping the way educationalists, specialists, teacher trainers or bureaucrats currently involved in provision construct their understandings is important as it shows how often labelling is "not knowing", and how often knowing reaches beyond labelling. It is important to see how pedagogic constructions work so that future teacher trainees can be supported to move on.

Cicero in *De Natura Deorum* I:X (6: 1998) famously criticizes authoritarian methods of pedagogy. He has in mind the intellectually crushing teacher, but his criticism may be extended to any education policy which, through its autocratic approach, dismisses the generative and vital presence of doubt and uncertainty, which sets at too low a level that which should be known and ignored. The account given here of dominant attitudes in one small country, and specifically and illustratively of the way those with SEN may be considered in policy planning but not in terms of real classrooms, suggests that authority may sometimes be a hindrance rather than an encouragement. As the research maps the genesis of a new field of educational provision in Oman it also hints at a new generation of professionals for whom the classroom is an inclusive place.

The thesis is organized first to project and contextualize Oman (chapter 1) and then to show the conceptual and terminological context of SEN (chapter 2). Chapter 2 acts as a review of the literature keeping in mind the needs of research at a UK university and the point-of-view of research within and directed at Oman: Western orthodoxy (see chapter 2.3) is therefore offered neither critically nor as contrast but rather in a context which may sometimes be more or less useful when studying Oman. The second chapter thus acts as a review of the literature as well as of the field of SEN. This is followed by a chapter examining the methodology used and the reasons for its use, explaining how the data sets came to offer up such rich information and the unique process of the research for and the generation of the thesis. Chapter 4 analyses the first data set of eight respondents, honing the coding technique to be used later in the analysis chapters, while chapter 5 offers a quantitative review – a snapshot – of special education in Oman

through data collected in questionnaires and personal observations (see Appendix A). The core of the thesis is the three analysis chapters – chapters 6, 7 and 8 – which examine the responses of the 18 members of the key data set according to concepts and policy, and their disjunction respectively. Chapter 9 draws the threads of the research narrative together and offers some tentatively positive conclusions.

CHAPTER 1: THE CONTEXT OF OMAN

This chapter focuses on the identity, both cultural and educational, of Oman. It considers the political geography of the region in the context of other Gulf states and the wider Arab Middle East. In terms of demographics, it offers a profile of a society undergoing considerable changes, and identifies some unique characteristics that impact on educational provision, and specifically on SENs. It examines current issues such as Omanization, the youthfulness of the population, the high incidence of genetically-related illness and the dominance of a psychomedical paradigm among education professionals. The researcher's unique perspective needs to be acknowledged at the outset (Berg and Smith, 1988). It should be borne in mind that the researcher is herself an Omani, educated at Omani schools and then at Sultan Qaboos University, where she completed both a BA and a Masters in the College of Education. Her father works as a member of the Omani Governing Council and the researcher's knowledge of his experiences offered her some insights into policy-making. She is also, and most crucially, a mother whose youngest son has been diagnosed with *proprionic acidemia* – which physical condition produces a considerable web of SENs. Her perspective in this research and the way the narrative is constructed are thus bounded and substantially defined by her experiences.

1.1: A Basic Outline

Oman, unlike the other Gulf States, is a nation with a long and independent history, dating back to the mid-18th century. It is the state which first made Arab diplomatic contact with the west, sending an ambassador by dhow to the US and to Britain in the

1840s. During the Twentieth Century Oman's history was dominated by two sultans: the first was Sultan Said (1932-1970) and the second Sultan Qaboos, the current ruler. Under Sultan Said there was significant contact with Britain, but since 1970 military-diplomatic power has increasingly been exercised locally by Oman.

Oman is geographically, ethnically and demographically a heterogeneous country of approximately 309,500 square kilometres. There are eight administrative regions: working from north to south these are Musandam, Al Batinah, Muscat (the capital region), Dhahira, Dakhiliya, Sharqiya, Al Wusta, and Dhofar. These regions vary considerably. In the north there are fertile coastal fringes and a mountainous interior; in the central area lies the arid Jiddat-il-Harasiis, while in parts of the southerly Dhofar region, which contains Oman's second city Salalah, Oman experiences a monsoon season (see regional map, figure 1.1).

Figure 1. 1: Map of Oman

This geographical variety allows agriculture to flourish and the growing of produce such as dates, lemons, papaya, coconuts, bananas and other fruit is common. However, since the arrival of oil and the growth in urban wealth creation, the agricultural sector has lost younger more talented males to employment mainly in service industries. Geography is a major resource for what Oman hopes to be a growing future economic sector - tourism. Already there is tourism and the Sultanate is determined to develop this area by removing some existing barriers to short-term visas.

As is clear from figure 1.1, Oman occupies a geographically strategic position (Skeet, 1992), a position that is likely to become more rather than less strategic over the next half century (Harvey, 2003). The northernmost district, the Peninsula of Musandam, overlooks the Strait of Hormuz, and it is through this narrow dogleg that oil tankers must pass from the Arabian Gulf onward into the Gulf of Oman towards either the Indian subcontinent or round into the sea-lanes of the Red Sea leading to the Suez Canal and EU shipping terminals.

Therefore, economically and militarily, geographical position is crucial: Oman is a useful stopping off point for either refuelling or repair between Far East and EU markets; it is close to the valuable markets of the Indian subcontinent, and is seeking to develop this strategic geography by actively modernizing and deepening its ports. The modernising of the port of Salalah was finished in 2001 and it is now one of the world's deepest. Work is in progress on similar facilities at Sohar. Finally, the geography provides, as elsewhere in the region, what has been and what continues to be – even as reserves approach exhaustion – the defining economic fact of Oman: oil and natural gas (Mansur and Treichel, 1999).

Socially Oman, traditionally a relatively tolerant society in Gulf terms, and one that has absorbed other cultural varieties, combines many religious sects and people of different origins, reflecting a long and active trading history, involving contacts and colonies down the eastern coast of Africa, the Indian subcontinent and throughout the Middle East and Persia. Most Omanis speak Arabic as their first language, and a great many speak and use English. Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) teaches some science and IT courses *only* in English. A group also speak Beluchi and a smaller number an ancient non-Arabic language. Those Omanis nationals who left Zanzibar in 1970 speak Swahili as well as English.

Government policy (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2004) is that all Omani citizens have equal rights and equal access to education, health and justice. Those working as guests within the state, many recruited in the early years of Sultan Qaboos's reign from neighbouring countries to help in infrastructural development (Skeet, 1992), also enjoy the provision of essential government services. The need to move away from reliance on non-Omanis, (Al-Yousef, 1995) has resulted in a need to increase and widen the working skills of Omanis themselves. Since the mid-1980s there has been a policy of Omanization, which has sought to replace guest workers with appropriately trained Omanis. "One of the main objectives . . . is to train Omanis to operate all telecommunications systems . . . . During 1999, locally conducted courses were run in management, finance, English language, computers and other technical subjects." (Ministry of Information, 2000: 163)

The most interesting demographic features are the low average age of the population and the high birth rate. The current population is 2,538,000 (Ministry of National Economy: 2003) of which 1,870,000 are Omani, and the remaining 668,000 are resident expatriate guest

workers (Ministry of Information, 2004: 204). Significantly, upwards of 50% of Omanis are under the age of 15, which has a negative impact on GDP, and puts a considerable strain on educational resources. More importantly, a growth rate of 3.7% – one of the world's largest by World Bank (2005) estimates – suggests that by 2016 the Omani community will number 2.9 million; by 2039 the estimate is 6 million.

Although oil was discovered in 1962 at the Bureimi fields in the north, and exploitation began in 1967, significant revenues were not enjoyed until after 1970. Since that time, Oman has undergone a considerable revolution as oil began to generate wealth. The government directed a significant percentage of the revenue into building the infrastructure of a modern state: roads, airports, water pumping stations, desalination plants, sewage treatment works, telecommunications and media, hospitals and, of course, schools, colleges and a university.

Oil price fluctuations coupled with the knowledge that 1995 was when Oman passed its half-way point of oil reserves, has prompted the government to look to ways of diversifying the economy, developing extraction of industrial quantities of urea and ammonia for fertilisers, integrating more effectively with neighbours of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Indian Ocean Rim (IOR) states, and promoting the production of gas and tourism. Proven oil reserves assessed in 2000 were 5.6 billion barrels (Economist Intelligence Unit, November 2000: 6). Privatisation of government-owned sectors such as telecom has been encouraged directly by the Sultan.

The government is headed by Sultan Qaboos, who appoints the Deputy Prime Ministers and other leading Ministers. The government takes advice from the Ministerial Cabinet and the Council of Oman. The Council of Oman is made up of two houses: the Consultative Council the "Majlis al-Shura", and the Council of State the "Majlis al-Dawla". Each member of the Majlis al-Shura is elected for a term of three years and may be of either sex; the franchise was extended to women in 1997, and there are currently two female members. Women are nominally encouraged to share power in all aspects of civil society but there may remain some restraints and constraints to such policy, although women outnumber men in higher education (Ministry of Education, 2000). Members of the Majlis al-Dawla are appointed by the Sultan with a consultative role in combination with the Majlis al-Shura (Ministry of Information, 2000: 32-33). In effect, many policy decisions continue to be made by the head of state and his immediate policy teams.

1.2: Education in Oman

1.2.1: 1970 - The "Renaissance" of Oman

Education became a policy area of crucial political weight with the change of government in 1970. Before that time there were only three "modern" state-funded schools in the entire country: two in the Muscat area, one in Salalah. These contained 909 male students taught by 30 teachers. The pupils were personally selected for the benefits of education by the Sultan. Elsewhere Koranic schools offered males the chance of basic literacy and numeracy. There were also three schools privately run by and for the expatriate community, and a US Christian missionary school for girls with a roll of 50 (Bosch and Bosch, 2000). There was no Ministry of Education, no policy aims and only the most basic educational philosophy.

With the accession of Sultan Qaboos changes were rapid, fuelled by increasing oil wealth and benefiting from a more apparent and structured philosophy of government. Policy discourses soon articulated a perception that education was crucial in establishing a modern state; the Sultan created a Council for Education in 1970, which was run by the Ministry of Education and answered directly to him.

The policy changes articulated in 1970 were swiftly implemented (Bosch and Bosch, 2000: 61). Within the first academic year the number of schools leapt to 16; student numbers to 6,941 (with 1,136 girls enrolled for the first time); 196 teachers began work, of which 30 were female. Currently there is universal access to primary education (6-11 year olds), though the net enrolment rates are 81.5% for males and 80.5% for females (Ministry of Education, 2000) (see chapter 1.2.5). Recently, the importance given to early education has been enhanced by a desire to invest in Oman's considerable human resources as part of the need to focus on "renewable" rather than "exhaustible" resources.

1.2.2: The increasing pace of change

Since 1970, the number engaged in primary, preparatory and secondary education, both staff and pupils, has climbed steadily, due to the expansionary government education policy and a high birth rate among Omanis. At every level of education, from pre-school to university, rolls have continued to increase. The total number of students in both public and private sectors in primary, preparatory and secondary education in the 2004-2005 academic year was approximately 600,000. Table 1.1 shows "Growth of Students – Primary, Preparatory, Secondary, Total 1990/91-1997/98" (Ministry of Education, 2000: 30). In the academic

year 1999/2000 that figure increased to 566,374, and in 2003/2004 is 576,472 in public education, a further 23,553 in private education (Ministry of Education, 2004: 2, 10). More than 50% of the overall total was concentrated in the capital area. (Ministry of Information, 2000: 112).

Table 1. 1:Growth of Students - Primary, Preparatory, Secondary, Total (Public + Private) 1990/91 – 2002/3: (Ministry of Education, 2003: 30) including expatriate students

Year	90/91	92/93	94/95	96/97	97/98	99/2000	2002/3
Primary	262,989	289,911	301,999	311,955	313,516	341,339	350,001
Preparatory	72,527	96,959	117,277	126,319	133,973	140,926	145,600
Secondary	25,799	40,141	60,079	77,027	81,700	84,109	130,871
Total	361,315	427,011	479,355	515,301	529,189	566,374	576,472

The primary (6-12) age group is the largest group (in the state sector) with average class sizes of 34 children (Ministry of Information, 2000: 112). The number of schools has also increased rapidly, especially over the period 1990-1998.

Table 1. 2: Growth of Schools - Primary, Preparatory and Secondary, Total (Public + Private) 1990/91 - 1997/98 (Ministry of Education, 1999: 27). The decreasing number of primary schools is because as preparatory grades are added to a primary school it is then classified as a preparatory school.

Cycle	Gender	90/91	91/92	92/93	93/94	95/96	96/97	97/98
Primary	Male	130	136	137	141	151	151	141
	Female	144	159	143	141	134	129	122
	Co-Ed	157	141	136	133	131	149	148
	Total	431	436	416	415	416	429	411
Preparatory	Male	144	162	173	191	202	205	205
	Female	102	124	150	177	196	206	205
	Co-ed	75	75	73	57	62	64	68
	Total	321	361	396	425	460	475	478
Secondary	Male	35	40	49	59	73	79	82
	Female	41	43	52	58	73	77	83
	Co-ed	2	3	5	6	7	8	8
	Total	78	86	106	123	153	164	173
Total		830	883	918	963	1,029	1,068	1,062

From almost non-existent female education in 1970, the female/male ratio has improved year on year, reflected in growing gender equality levels and adult literacy. For example, at grade 1 in 1997/98 there were 27,972 males enrolled, and 26,963 females. Although the gender gap widens slightly in grades 3 to 7, by grade 8 the trend begins to reverse. Enrolment rates show this shift towards greater equality in participation rates.

Between 1970 and 2000 the number of teachers also increased from 196 to over 22,000 (which includes 123 private schools employing 1,628 teachers).

Table 1. 3: Age Specific Enrolment Ratio of Primary Age Children (Age 6-11) (Ministry of Education, 1999: 135)

Age (years)	Total (F+M)	Female	Male	Gender Parity F/M
6	84.8%	83.9%	85.7%	.98
7	90.6%	87.8%	93.2%	.94
8	90.6%	89.9%	91.4%	.98
9	90.0%	89.1%	90.8%	.98
10	91.0%	90.8%	91.2%	1.0
11	81.4%	80.9%	81.8	.99

1.2.3: The Omani educational system

Like many developing states, and all Gulf states, education is a much more centralized affair than in the EU: the Ministry of Education oversees all pre-school, primary, preparatory and secondary education. University-level education is under the supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education, while vocational training is controlled by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour and Vocational Training (now Ministry of Social Development). The aims of the education system as a whole are clearly delineated and reflect national needs.

(i) To tackle and eradicate illiteracy;
(ii) To remove problems of gender inequality;
(iii) To obviate regional inequalities;
(iv) To encourage better health awareness and thus health care provision;
(v) To train Omanis to take an active part in the economy as part of the current government "Omanization" programme;
(vi) To invest in the renewable human resources. (Ministry of Education, 1999: 20-25)

The structure of Omani education has been based on a 6 year primary school period, and then 3 years for preparatory and 3 for secondary education. This is being simplified to two levels: a simpler system of a basic primary education lasting 10 years, followed by a secondary education of 2. Each grade level after grade 4 is examined before students are allowed to graduate upwards into the next grade; those students who successfully complete the first tier of their education are automatically entitled to pass on to the second.

There is a national syllabus, initially derived from other Arab education systems – though there are also UK and US influences in some private schools. The Ministry of Education has tried to develop a distinctively Omani syllabus, though what exactly this means in practice is unclear. The primary syllabus contains 10 core subjects: Religion, Arabic, Social Sciences, Science, Maths, Physical Education, Art, English, Vocational Activities (though not in all schools) and Music. The secondary syllabus expands to include History, Geography, Arab World studies, Chemistry, Physics, Biology, General Science, Humanities, Omani Society, Islamic Culture, and Current World Issues (Al-Alawi, 1994: 11-13; Ministry of Education, 2000). Current changes in the length of terms and the teaching of English from an early stage may advance curricular harmonization. There are now (2005) plans to adapt the

education system to meet changing needs for a more specifically skilled workforce: to extend classroom hours (lessons will be lengthened from 35 to 40 minutes) and to increase the number of hours spent in the first 10 years of education from 5,693 hours to 9,600 hours (Ministry of Education, 1999: 20-25). To help, the school year has been lengthened from 32 weeks to 36 weeks.

Since such a large percentage of Omanis are under 15 the need to prepare them, not only to take a useful role in the economy when mature but also to adapt to their changing social environment, is that much greater. The Ministry of Education in their fourth and fifth Five Year Plans (1991-95; 1996-2000) implemented significant reform in seven key areas (Ministry of Education, 2000: 24-25).

(1) Pre-school education;

(2) Basic education (Grades 1-10);

(3) Adult literacy;

(4) Education of the disabled;

(5) Teacher education and training;

(6) Curriculum, textbooks and educational technology;

(7) Educational management, monitoring and evaluation.

The stated aims are to enhance student performance and the functioning and responsiveness of the education system at all levels; the underpinning philosophy is to include as many as

possible in the economy. Whether or not these aims are being met in any meaningful way is debateable; one critic is particularly scathing.

> The stifling Omani ministerial attitude to schools is recreated by the management of those schools, and passed on to teachers, who then, perhaps through a cynicism or general disengagement, pass it on [to students and parents] ... . Political and social attitudes cascade through the educational system, creating particularly negative environments .... (Al Belushi, 2003: 262-263)

An effective and committed teaching staff is the key to any education system, and its support is necessary if any improvements are to be made. By the 2003/04 academic year there were 32,345 teachers working in the education sector – schools, colleges and universities (Ministry of Education, 2004: 9). 78% of those in general education and 84% in basic education were Omanis (Ministry of Education, 2004: 8). The continuing aim is to enlarge this percentage. The expansion of teacher training (see chapter 1.3) is designed to reduce dependence on expatriates and, simultaneously, encourage the Omanization of pedagogy and the syllabus.

SQU, opened in September 1986, is the main university in Oman (see chapter 1.3.2 for a breakdown of its faculties). It is a key provider of teacher training, with close links both to the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Development. A second, privately funded university at Sohar accepted its first intake of undergraduates in autumn 2005, and a third at Salalah is planned to begin limited courses. In total approximately 12,000 students were enrolled in undergraduate and diploma programmes in 2004/2005 (Ministry of Information, 2004: 138). In addition to these universities, there are literacy centres across Oman dedicated to help those unable previously to complete their education. In the

2002/2003 academic year, 6,622 students were enrolled in such centres (Ministry of Information, 2004: 134).

1.2.4: Systemic tensions

Despite some important changes made in a very short period, 1999 school enrolment ratios show Oman (with 59%) lagging behind Bahrain (84%), Qatar (75%) and the UAE (80%). 2005 figures (www.unesco.org/wef/countryreports/oman: accessed on 7.04.2005) on adult literacy show Oman (69.6%) worsted only by Saudi Arabia (60%) and Yemen (41.1%). When compared to other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states it might be suggested that Oman needs to devote a greater percentage of GDP to education: the 2000 Omani educational budget represented only 14.1% of total government expenditure.

2003/2004 figures (Ministry of Education, 2004) for secondary education pupil/teacher ratio show Oman doing better (averaging 16 pupils per teacher) than all its neighbours except the richer states of Saudi Arabia (13 pupils) and the UAE (13 pupils). However, Oman has *significantly* underperformed in contrast with its neighbours in pupil-teacher ratios in the primary cycle (28 pupils per teacher). This cycle could be much more crucial to learning development. Only Qatar (30 pupils per teacher) and Yemen (35) have larger classes.

There is evidence of different educational achievement according to gender in Oman. Girls outperform boys: the coefficient of pass levels at the final year of primary school in 1996/97 was 79.4% for females, and 64.6% for males. Although the drop-out rate is slightly higher for girls than boys between grades 1 and 9 (1.4% for females, 1.3% for males) this may be

due to social pressures external to the educational environment, and the rate of year repetition may be a better guide to overall gender performance: 10.7% of males need to repeat a grade year, while only 7.6% of females must do so (Ministry of Education, 2004: no.s 27/29).

1.3: Teacher Training

The political changes that initiated modernisation were not without their problems, since the challenge was to offer education for the first time in Omani history to all Omanis. On a practical level, this change immediately meant a demand for teachers. Initially this was satisfied from outside Oman, mostly from other Arab states, especially Egypt. Since the emphasis was on filling the growing number of vacancies as new schools began to admit students, quantity rather than quality was emphasised.

Training Omani primary teachers began in the 1975-1976 academic year, and this was called "the First Programme"; students who had completed their studies as far as first preparatory level (UK end of primary education; US 7th grade) could be enrolled in a two year course of teacher training (Issan, 1995; Ministry of Education, 1999). Twenty-five students were accepted onto this programme, which ran only once. A successor was developed for the 1977-1978 academic year, called "Teachers' Secondary School". This three-year programme demanded that those who applied had successfully completed their Third Preparatory Certificate (equivalent to an exam taken prior to secondary education in the UK; grade 9 in the US). On completing this course trainees received a secondary school

teaching certificate. Similar programmes ran simultaneously in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia (Issan, 1995).

To supplement this, for holders of secondary school certificates a single-year programme the "Teachers' Institutes/Additional Courses", was introduced for the 1979-1980 academic year, at the end of which trainees received a "Diploma of Elementary Education". The total number of teachers who graduated from these programmes before their cancellation in 1983 was 2,521 (Issan, 1995). The cancellation was due to the programmes' inability to produce effective teachers.

Currently the institutes responsible for the preparation of pre-service Omani teachers at all levels are the colleges of education or teacher training colleges (TTCs) and the College of Education and Islamic Sciences at SQU.

1.3.1: Teacher training colleges

The current teacher training system was implemented in the 1994-1995 academic year at colleges in Rustaq and Nizwa. In total there are now six TTCs: in addition to Rustaq and Nizwa, these are at Sohar, Ibri, Sur and Salalah. Four colleges are same sex and two co-educational. The colleges offer a four-year system, which can be extended for a maximum of six years, after which students graduate as Bachelors of Education.

The TTC year is divided into two terms, each lasting eighteen weeks; there is an additional summer course of eight weeks. The colleges use a "credit hours" system, and students must

finish 132 hours to graduate successfully. The minimum number of credit hours a student may take in a single term is twelve, and the maximum eighteen; the summer course offers a maximum of nine hours. These "credit hours" are divided into three categories:

(a) Subject area of specialisation courses: these are generally allocated 73 credit hours except for the programme for section one of basic education, which is allocated 63 hours.

(b) Vocational skills courses: these are allocated 33 credit hours except for the programme for section one of basic education, which is allocated 36 hours.

(c) Teaching practice: this is allocated 26 credit hours except again for the programme for section one of basic education, which is allocated 3 hours.

The colleges train teachers across subject areas: Arabic, Islamic studies, science, history, geography and, most recently, computer sciences. In the 2002/2003 academic year 8,529 students were enrolled (Ministry of Information, 2004: 140). The choice of specialisation and content of the curriculum at TTCs mirrors similar courses at SQU (see chapter 1.3.2) and is planned around needs defined by the Ministry of Education (2003). This could entail a disjunction between the chalkface needs of a system of education and policy as it is produced (chapters 6 – 8). Because of the Ministry's recent introduction of a new system of basic education, the TTCs have adopted new curriculum content and methods of training. All graduates are civil servants employed directly by the Ministry of Education.

As well as teacher training, TTCs see their goals as conducting scientific research and community service. However, according to Badr (interviewed 2001: see chapter 4), teaching takes up more than 90% of the college's efforts, and the other goals occupy less TCC time. The reason is that members of staff are overburdened with their main tasks, and it may also be that the goal of "community service" is not a very clear concept.

1.3.2: Sultan Qaboos University (SQU)

Situated in the capital, Muscat, SQU was completed and opened in 1986. The University started with five faculties: Education and Islamic Studies, Medicine, Engineering, Science and Agriculture. In 1987 the Faculty of Arts was established, and in 1993 the Faculty of Commerce and Economics. Graduate (Masters) programmes have been offered since 1993 at the Faculties of Arts and Education and Islamic Studies. In 1996 a graduate programme was added, offering Agricultural Economics, directly in response to the crisis in Omani agriculture already described (chapter 1.1).

The academic year is divided into two terms. The first starts in September and ends in January; the second begins in February and ends in June with examinations. An optional summer term is also available, running for only 8 weeks, with studies condensed. Accommodation is separate for males and females, and the university enjoys the usual range of higher education facilities such as a library, computer centre, English Language department with teaching laboratories, and a teaching hospital. Both English and Arabic are used for teaching – though as has already been noted, some subjects are taught only in

English. SQU has established connections with other universities in various fields, and is involved in a number of research projects in partnership with local and international bodies.

1.3.2.1: The Faculty of Education and Islamic Sciences

This is the largest faculty according to numbers of students enrolled, numbers of teaching staff, and second only to the teaching hospital in terms of financial resources. At the end of a four-year course students graduate as Bachelors of Education. This qualification enables them to work as both preparatory and secondary teachers. Specialisations include the Islamic Sciences themselves and Arabic; English language, physical education, fine arts, geography, history, the natural sciences (biology, physics and chemistry), maths and computer sciences.

To be matriculated students must fulfil certain requirements - some uniquely Omani.

(1) Hold a secondary school certificate with total grades at or above 85%;
(2) Have a "good reputation";
(3) Be medically fit;
(4) Pass all initial interviews;
(5) Preferably be a graduate of a secondary school in the same year as matriculation;
(6) Be no older than 25 (unless otherwise stipulated or exempted by the University's Academic Council). (Ministry of Education, 1999).

Point (2) clearly differs from matriculation requirements at EU universities: a "good reputation" is subjective and determined by vague criteria. Point (3), the demand to be "medically fit", could be seen to disqualify some of those with disabilities. According to the

Ministry of Education (1999) the aims of the Faculty of Education and Islamic Sciences are predictable enough.

> (1) To prepare highly-qualified personnel to teach in various specialisations at both preparatory and secondary levels, in keeping with the highest pedagogical standards, to meet the increasing demand for education in the Sultanate;
> (2) To train students in up-to-date teaching methods and to foster "Arab and Islamic values";
> (3) To undertake educational and psychological research in order to enhance the practice of teaching; to encourage academic research and "self-study", and to enable specialists to keep up with the latest developments in their fields and make them more aware of cultural, academic and social needs at local and international levels;
> (4) To participate with the Ministry of Education in developing the content and objectives of the education system, teaching methods, educational media, and systems of evaluation (such as examinations), the writing of textbooks and organising in-service courses for teachers at various levels;
> (5) To pool experience and coordinate efforts in the field of educational and psychological research with educational institutions at local, Gulf, wider Arab and international levels;
> (6) To enhance the quality of instruction in the Faculty and in the University as a whole, and analyse the results of research on teaching development programmes at the University;
> (7) To serve the community by participating in educational and cultural activities and offering technical expertise to educational and social organisations in the fields of education and psychology;
> (8) To enrich the cultural and intellectual life of the University by offering a variety of activities and events. (www.squ.ed.om: 12.08.2004)

It may be that much of the Ministry's mission statement is more rhetorical fancy than something evidenced in practice. Enhancing, serving and enriching are colourful and worthy words, but there is less evidence of their effect in the world of Omani teacher training, SEN education or, indeed, education as a whole (Al Belushi, 2003).

In order to graduate as a Bachelor of Education with the requisite 132 credit hours, a student must pass through a programme of three main components, each with allocated credits.

(i) **General Cultural Courses:** this part of the programme is required of all students. They gain 18 credit hours, and most spend their first year fulfilling these requirements while also taking some specialisation courses.

(ii) **Educational Courses:** courses in education, psychology, teaching methods, curriculum, microteaching and teaching practice. These are allocated 36 credit hours.

(iii) **Subject Area or Specialisation Courses:** these are allocated 78 credit hours (Issan, 1995: 83).

It may be difficult to place SEN preparation within this pedagogic structure, and it is likely to appear (if at all) within the psychology component of (ii): this almost automatically reflects a psychomedicalized model of disability (see chapter 6.3) (Slee, 1998; Clark, Dyson and Milward, 1998).

Teaching practice takes place in the final year, during the seventh and eighth terms. For one day a week in the seventh term student teachers undergo placement in one of the public preparatory schools, with classes of 11-14 year olds. This continues in the next term, with the addition of a second full day spent at a secondary school.

This structure of pre-service teaching practice, with significantly less classroom contact for student teachers than is usual in the EU, was adopted to avoid practical problems (Issan, 1995) such as limited resources – there is simply not enough staff to supervise a more intensive pre-service placement. In 1995, only one member of staff could be provided for each specialization, this ratio rising to two for students in popular specializations where classes number more than 100. There very few members of staff at either SQU or the TTCs who currently specialize in SEN.

A significant difficulty lies in the provision of classroom teacher training for a full term which demands a large number of participating schools. This is not possible because there are not enough schools in the Muscat area where the university is located. Using schools further afield would incur travel and accommodation costs and increased logistical problems either for the respondents or researcher. These difficulties are reflected in the problem of data gathering in this research – physical accessibility was a problem (see chapter 3.1). The staff would find it difficult to supervise the activities of trainees in far flung schools, and there is no history of cooperation between SQU and schools in other regions.

The aims of the course at SQU are generally of a practical pedagogic nature, as might be expected with the stress placed on supervised classroom management and meeting working teachers, the opportunity to use the national curriculum and the development of social skills and awareness of the aims, organisation and management of Omani schools. The only suggestion of meeting SEN comes with the development of special skills needed in different areas of the school syllabus – however specific mention of SEN is avoided, except by vague implication (Issan, 1995: 111-112).

During teaching practice, three professionals share supervision and assessment: a member of Faculty staff, the school principal and a "cooperating teacher". Supervision is so designed that the Faculty staff member will pay two or three visits to the trainee in their classroom during the seventh term. In the final term these are increased to between three and five visits. The cooperating teacher attends all the lessons given by the trainee, a supervision which is stressed when the Faculty staff member is not present. The school principal has the

task of assessing the trainee in administrative competence of areas such as attendance, participation in school activities, the degree to which the trainee works with their cooperating teacher as well as other teachers who are teaching the same class. The principal is also expected to make one or two classroom visits to the trainee. This structure of supervision may be such that an already uniform system becomes even more so. The role of the cooperating teacher in the context of the aims of the TT course is unlikely to encourage the raising of awareness of unusual or challenging issues.

1.4: The context of SEN

Before 1970 there was no information about or acknowledgement of SEN in Oman, and therefore no provision. In the years following 1970 some provision was occasionally made – or occasionally articulated within the education system. In the 1974-1975 academic year the Ministry of Education opened the Department of Literacy and Special Needs (DLSN – now split between literacy and special needs) signalling the beginning of a degree of recognition, at least at some level within the bureaucracy. At the same time some disabled students were sent to institutes in other Arab states. This new department may have reflected the start of an interest in disablement among education policy-makers and a partial recognition of the rights of those with SEN. It may well be that the DLSN was a "plug in" department borrowed from another education system along with foreign educationalists; many of those identified as having SEN during that period had their needs met in other Arab states. Three categories of disablement – visually and auditorally impaired, and paraplegia – are sent annually to Kuwaiti special schools. Bahrain accepts some visually impaired students. These

students gain a preparatory educational certificate before returning home, some to join the public school system.

The first domestic attempt at meeting SEN was for those students with auditory and allied impairments when, in 1978, the DLSN opened ordinary schoolroom classes at a public school in Muscat. This was a modest class of 10 students who received a modified version of the primary first year (grade 1) curriculum. This first step led on to others. In 1980-81 the Al Amal School for the Deaf was opened in the capital with a boarding facility for those who do not live within the Muscat area. Initially this was a modest effort of four classes for 20 students (9 males and 11 females), expanded in 1993-94 to 222 students (161 males and 61 females) in 11 classes distributed between elementary and preparatory educational levels. In 1999/2000, 517 students were enrolled in both the Al Amal School and the Tarbiyeh al Fekriyeh School for the Mentally Retarded (also known as the "Ideology School"), founded in 1984. A new school was established in 1999 for those with visual impairments - the Omar bin Alkhatab School for the Blind. This was the last of the three schools to be established, but the delay may reflect a hierarchy of socially acceptable disablement (see chapter 6). (See 1.4.5 for a detailed account of the three special schools, and chapter 5 for an analysis of data gathered there.)

Although this level of provision was an improvement, SEN education is still basic (Ministry of Education, 1999: 20-25) though there is a considerable effort to increase its profile (Ministry of Information, 2004: 145-148). A putative policy called the Pilot Project to augment the current deficit is being tested by the Ministry to integrate SEN children into the

mainstream (see chapter 4.1). There has been, since the early 1990s, coordination between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Development to relate the SEN educational curriculum directly to workplace needs.

Before the 1970 increase in medical cover for the population, disabilities were frequently linked to the effects of disease. Now other factors play a more prominent role. Some factors are directly linked to maternal health and the medical conditions surrounding birth – including oxygen deprivation during delivery – such as premature delivery, underweight full-term babies and brain damaged infants. Underweight babies may be more directly the combined consequences of poor female education and unhealthy traditional practices and too many pregnancies, poorly spaced. Another common factor is congenital malformation: because Omani society often encourages the marriage of closely-related people genetic disorders of various kinds have a particularly high incidence. Genetic problems may be compounded by Omanization which could, if rigorously enforced, create a more closed population. The final major cause of disability is the increasing number of road and domestic accidents (Beely and Barwani, 1994: 42). Early marriage linked to poor female education, lack of adequate family planning and a cultural stigma attached to contraception produce the classic high fertility rates of a developing state. Regarding all causes of disabilities, the Ministry of Health (2000) holds a monitoring brief as the key body concerned with the identification and follow up of those born with or living with disability.

1.4.1: Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

Although "NGO" usually connotes independence in terms of control, influence and funding, in Oman NGOs may often be much closer to government – akin to quangos in the UK (see 4.1.2). The key Association for the Care of Disabled Children (ACDC) is linked to the Ministry of Social Development and is a public association established in 1991 by ministerial degree, with its headquarters in Muscat. There is a board of 12 directors, limited to a membership period of 2 years. The Association is active in all of Oman's regions, and its aims are compatible with disability rights discourses.

> (1) To give disabled children dignity, to offer care, to draw attention to their rights, to develop and establish relevant services and create a better educational and social environment for SN students.
> (2) To help SN students adjust and integrate into society vocationally, psychologically, socially and culturally.
> (3) To support research and relevant specialised scientific studies and encourage such research for the sake of the care of the disabled.
> (4) To develop health awareness among the public on issues associated with the rights of the disabled child, as well as raising awareness of preventative health measures.
> (5) To participate in national projects for the care of the disabled child and organize projects and activities in different regions.
> (6) To encourage public and private institutions to offer voluntary services for the disabled child. (Translated from Ministry of Social Affairs, 1999: 39)

The ACDC deals with children designated as deaf and mentally disabled, offering specific programmes which suit special needs and abilities. The largest programme involves daily skills and learning "corrective" behaviour, as well as sport, music and art (Ministry of Social Affairs, 1999). The ACDC has opened four centres for the care of disabled children; trained Omani volunteers to work in centres for disabled children; organised seminars and training courses to train those who work full time or on a voluntary basis with disabled children;

organised activities to integrate disabled children into Omani national celebrations; held exhibitions and charitable activities, and taken part in conferences, exhibitions and seminars at the Gulf, Arab and international level (Ministry of Social Affairs, 1999). Because the ACDC has a specifically social rather than educational role, the effects the on teacher training must be negligible. There seems to be little or no awareness of the Association, or any other NGO, among the data set (see chapters 6, 7 and 8).

The Oman Association for the Disabled (OAD) was founded in 1995 and is based in Muscat. Its activities are nationwide, coordinated by its Muscat headquarters. Just as with the ACDC, there are 12 members of a board of directors with membership limited to 2 years. Aims are (1) to build self-confidence and self-reliance among the disabled; to train according to abilities and needs with a specific remit of service to the community; (2) to organize seminars publicising the activities and achievements of the disabled, and thus to facilitate contributions from the public (in terms of voluntary work); (3) to carry out relevant research, to support such research by taking part in specific seminars and conferences, and exchanging visits at all levels with other similar bodies (Ministry of Social Affairs, 1999: 42).

The OAD has been successful in creating a level of awareness in Oman about disability issues, though again this awareness seems to be limited: it has not permeated far into government departments, SQU or the TTCs. Nevertheless, the OAD may have helped change the attitude of some regarding the integration of the disabled (Ministry of Social Affairs, 1999).

The Noor Association for the Blind (NAB) was founded in 1997 and is based in Muscat. Its aims are (1) to treat the problems faced by the visually impaired, and help define their needs in society; (2) to distribute cultural, social and health awareness among the public, and the visually impaired in particular; (3) to emphasise the activities and skills of the visually impaired, and encourage their participation in national events (Ministry of Social Affairs, 1999: 45). The NAB has participated in conferences such as the 1998 Rihab International Conference for the disabled, and facilitated free check-ups at a private hospital leading to treatment. It has supplied equipment such as glasses and sticks, and organised courses in braille for volunteers at the Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) centres.

1.4.2: Ministries, ministerial departments and linked bodies

The Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour and Vocational Training (now the Ministry of Social Development) was established in 1972 with the remit of formulating social care policy, covering problems associated with sickness, disability, old age, death of a partner or parents. The policies initiated might involve welfare payments to those whose cases have been identified as needy. For the first time the disabled were offered a level of welfare payment. The Special Care Directorate under the Director General of Social Affairs (DGSA) was established in 1980; its remit was specifically the disabled. The responsibilities of the Special Care Directorate can be divided between technical support, policy initiation and research.

(1) Technical supervision of centres and units concerned with those requiring special care – for example the three special schools (see chapter 5).

(2) Designing policy for the care of the disabled – this may extend to proposing new laws to enhance and develop the lives of the disabled. This includes participation in a "Technical Committee" responsible for the admission and vocational counselling of the disabled, and collecting and collating information related to the disabled, and using it in policy planning.

(3) Participation in training programmes at institutes, schools, private companies and other training institutions. (Barwani and Beely, 1994: 9-10)

There are two departments in the Directorate: the first responsible for care and rehabilitation, the second with the placement and monitoring of the disabled in vocational training and employment.

The Centre for the Care and Rehabilitation of the Disabled (CCRD) was established in 1987 to train those with auditory and motor disabilities for employment within the community. The Centre provides psychological services and training as well as educational programmes. The Centre also has a remit to educate the wider community about disability, and carries out labour market studies, coordinates with other relevant bodies, and advises disabled people setting up in business. Run by a director who reports directly to the DGSA, the Centre has four departments: (1) Department of Social Care; (2) Department of Rehabilitation; (3) Psychological Care Department; (4) Administrative and Financial Affairs Department (Barwani and Beely, 1994: 12). The Centre provides a basic curriculum at its facilities,

covering typing, carpentry, sewing, domestic sciences and welding. It also offers core curricular education in Arabic, Islamic Studies, Maths and Cultural Studies.

CBR Centres, initiated in 1989, are regional and funded locally though supported by the Ministry, and supervised by the DGSA through community volunteers with only basic training. There are therefore wide differences between individual centres in terms of volunteer approach and commitment. By 1993 there were 10 Centres located in the regions (at Bid Bid, Nizwa, Salalah, Rustaq, Ibri, Sohar, Ibra, Sur, Bureimi and Taqa – see figure 1.1) providing 3-5 day programmes for 388 disabled students up to 15 years old. Centres coordinate with local hospitals and offer basic school curricula (ranging through art, music and social skills). UNICEF run a training programme for Centre workers and volunteers (Al Kindi, 1994: 21). Affiliated agencies include the National Committee for the Welfare of Disabled Persons (NCWDP) and the Directorate General for Women's and Children's Affairs (DGWCA).

The National Committee for Service to the Disabled (NCSD) was established by the Ministry in 1981, and relaunched in 1986, its remit to coordinate policy on the disabled between key ministries. Of the 13 members of the Committee, 4 are from the Ministry of Social Development and the other 9 from the Ministries of Defence, Education, Health, Information, Posts Telegraphs and Telephones, the Police, Omani Chamber of Commerce and a disabled community representative. Despite important objectives such as proposing general legislation for the disabled, conducting research, encouraging the participation of the private sector, and education and coordination with international bodies, in 1994 there was

only one permanent employee of the NCSD (Barwani and Beely, 1994), and although in 2005 there have been improvements, the situation is not significantly or deeply changed.

The National Disabled Sports Team reflects the perception – at least among some education policy makers – of the importance of sport to the disabled. The Ministry ensures that Oman is represented at Gulf, Asian and international sporting events, and the Omani disabled sports team won gold, silver and bronze medals at the International Sports Championship for the Disabled at Stoke Mandeville in 1994 (Ministry of Social Affairs, 1999) and in 2000 participated in the Sydney Paralympics.

The Centre for the Care of Disabled Children (CCDC) was established in 1997, and works closely with the CCRD. The CCDC has spaces for 120 children aged between 3 and 14 and works around three shifts (morning, afternoon and evening) with the objectives of providing medical care and physiotherapy, social and psychological services, and programmes to improve skill, vocational abilities and speech. The aim of the CCDC is to help the disabled child achieve the highest possible degree of independence in carrying out daily activities (Ministry of Social Affairs, 1999).

It is also important to mention, in the context of Oman's special genetic problems, the Centre for Genetic Counselling and the Centre for Early Detection. There are also the 17 Wafa Voluntary Social Centres of community-based support – called "rehabilitation support programmes" by the Ministry of Information (2004) – with 270 female volunteers serving 1,510 handicapped children (Ministry of Information, 2004: 146).

The aim of all SEN organizations and programmes is to provide a general education programme for those disabled who may somehow fall through the educational system and be ill-served by the national curriculum. This means developing the abilities of those with SEN in order to achieve maximum self-reliance and the programmes therefore have an economic as well as social purpose. However, their low profiles suggest their impact may not be uniform or extensive across Oman.

1.4.3: The Ministry of Health

The Ministry of Health works closely in association with different relevant sectors, with the articulated aim of reducing the growing number of people with disabilities in Oman as well as alleviating the problems experienced by those directly and indirectly affected by disability. There seems to be little recognition that these aims might be contradictory, representing discourses which cannot compliment each other. The Ministry has an extensive programme of prophylaxis, vaccinating against polio and other infections which may lead to various types of disability.

The Ministry's educational programme aims at the avoidance or alleviation of those conditions which may be a factor in inherited physical disfigurements and birth-related disabilities. This programme includes funding pregnancy clinics, antenatal care and environmental health information – this latter to reduce the percentage of contagious diseases, as well as malaria and diarrhoea. There are currently policies to open private clinics to screen for genetic disorders before marriage, to supervise medication and therefore

avoid addiction or abuse, to improve hospital facilities, and to reduce the high road, industrial and domestic accident figures.

The Ministry currently runs health services for the disabled - for example, physiotherapy centres. It has also started a national database of neonatal cases involving what can be translated as "disfigurements". The aim is to gauge the extent and quality of treatment, but once again work helps to strengthen professional medicalization of disability.

Mental disabilities and behavioural variations (designated predictably as "problems") receive treatment at Ibn Sina Hospital, which has 81 beds. In 1996, 626 cases received treatment, in 2004 this had declined to 37 (Ministry of Health, 2004). The Ministry also aims to open specialized clinics for psychological illnesses in some regional hospitals.

1.4.4: The Ministry of Education's Five Year Plan 2001-2006 as it relates to SEN students

This policy document suggests establishing SEN schools in the densely populated regions of Oman, as well as the opening of new classes in public schools with the aim of integrating SEN students. Due to the increase in the number of SEN students such integration was implemented in the 2000-2001 academic year in one region, and will gradually become the norm throughout the Omani education system. It is also intended to provide basic SEN requirements at public schools to make integration easier. Despite the existence of this document – and the various NGOs – it is evident that knowledge of these developments is limited (see chapters 6, 7 and 8).

1.4.5: The three special schools

As already stated, in Oman there are three special schools.

The Al Amal School for the Deaf-Mute was opened in the 1980-81 academic year and has 3 educational levels: (1) 2 years introductory level; (2) 6 years elementary level; (3) 3 years preparatory level. Students for the Al Amal School should only have auditory or speech impairments, and have an IQ of not less than 70 points (Wechsler and Binet Test Average). A medical check up is needed prior to admission, and acceptance is decided on by the DSEN based on the School's recommendations. In the academic year 1993-1994 there were 238 students (167 male and 71 female), aged from 6 to 28 years old (Barwani and Beely, 1994). These figures have changed considerably in 10 years – in the academic year 2004-2005 there were approximately 600 students (Ministry of Information, 2004: 134).

The philosophy of the school is to offer an education service to students, providing the appropriate academic skills to assist them to develop and prepare for life through the teaching of vocational skills, helping develop social skills, developing cooperative and linguistic abilities, and improving alternative communication skills such as signing. The School also aims to make families aware of the causes of their child's disability, and the best ways to help, as well as to provide medical, social and psychological services (Barwani and Beely, 1994).

The curriculum is adapted from the traditional public school curriculum. The topics are chosen to suit the auditorally impaired child, and are designed to be adaptable to all

classroom levels. The Ministry of Education (2005) is studying improvements to the curriculum. Lip reading and signing are used to communicate.

Vocational training is gender-restrictive: during the vocational training stage of 3 years the student can specialise in carpentry or typing (boys) or typing, sewing and tailoring (girls). In addition there is physical education, art, music, family education and agricultural studies. Jobs deemed "suitable" for the School's graduates were limited in the early 1990s: secretarial work, carpentry, labouring, cannery and packaging work, painting and decorative work, textile work and postal sorting and delivery (Barwani and Beely, 1994: 35) – this has not changed.

The Al Tarbiyah Al Fikreya ("Study of the Intellect") School was opened in the 1984/85 academic year with 20 students (13 male and 7 female), by the 1999-2000 academic year there were 256 students (89 female, 167 male), and in the 2004-2005 academic year there were approximately 300 students. The School is dedicated to the educationally challenged who are in the educable range of 50-70 IQ points (Mentally Retarded School Guide, cited in Barwani and Beely, 1994), and excludes students with other physical or sensory disabilities which might complicate the School's provision of its curriculum. This consists of (a) an introductory level lasting 2 years; (b) a modified elementary education of 6 years (designed by the DSEN) to implement a flexible approach, and (c) 3 years of vocational training, based on modified standard vocational curricula (plus a certain amount of general knowledge) (Ministry of Education, 1990). The School also provides psychological and social services.

The student can specialise in the following fields: carpentry for boys; weaving and carpet weaving for boys and girls, and tailoring and sewing for girls – once again teaching is very gender-specific. Also, the School provides more usual academic activities such as physical education, art, music, agricultural studies and "tarbeya osareyah" (family studies). The DSEN is considering developing this curriculum – though what criteria it uses and what type of policy advice is given is difficult to determine.

Education at the School is based on reinforcing personal health through activities which strengthen students' senses of security, self confidence and independence, developing language and mathematical skills, as well as more general knowledge.

The Omar bin Alkhatab Institute for the Blind was opened in the 1999-2000 academic year in Muscat with 7 male and 4 female students, who are accepted between the ages of 6 and 10 only. In the 2000-2001 academic year students from 11-18 were allowed to attend 3 years of literacy classes, leading to the award of a certificate of proficiency. In first year preparation classes the student learns basic skills and braille. There are also visits to socially and culturally important places to help the visually impaired student integrate socially and gain confidence for independent daily activities. (See appendix A for researcher observations of the schools.)

1.4.6: Workshop on Integration

This was held from the 23-27 September 2000 with the support of UNICEF's Muscat offices in two schools of the south Al Batinah region. It was headed by Dr Jamal Mohammed al Hatib of UNICEF and covered methods of teaching students with SEN in the state school system. The workshop was organised as a response to concern at the DSEN about formalising an effective method for academic and social integration for those with SEN, and to provide the required components to make integration successful. There were 32 participants, including heads of departments, and senior teaching staff from two state schools.

The aims of the workshop were divided between the needs and meaning of identification, SEN and pedagogy and integration, to clarify the meaning of integration, and assess methods of carrying it into effect and creating strategies for modifying teaching methods; to discuss ways of evaluating and modifying behaviours, methods of defining and strengthening "proper" behaviour, and improving practical attitudes towards students with SEN and of the parents of those students. Finally, the workshop sought to present and benefit from the experiences of other states in the field of integration (Ministry of Education, 2000). The workshop might be seen as indicative of a shift in the perception of SENs and disability more generally in Oman were it not that, like NGOs and the Ministry of Education's Five Year Plan, none the respondents made any reference to it. The impact and relevance of the workshop may therefore be assessed as minimal.

1.4.7: Salamanca

In June 1994, 92 governments and 25 NGOs attended the Salamanca Conference, whose Declaration was hoped to be a milestone, offering a "commitment to Education for All, recognising the necessity and urgency of providing education for children, youth and adults with special educational needs within the regular educational system" (UNESCO, 1994: 1). Educational specialists, bureaucrats and policy-makers, set out their "Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education" and added a "Framework for Action". Ninety-two governments and twenty-five organizations attended the Conference, which was linked to the overall declaration of human rights by UNESCO. This has risen to one hundred and eighty-eight countries that have affiliated themselves to the statement since 1994.

In essence the Statement extolled inclusive approaches to disablement and education, and argued for greater cooperation between governments on all aspects of provision.

Salamanca was a direct result of the 1990 "Framework for Action" developed at the Jomtien Conference (Hegarty, 1998). One outcome in Oman may have been the initiation of the Pilot Project, but little else. Eleven years after Salamanca, there seems to have been a minimal impact either on disablement discourses or SEN policies in Oman. In the Omani bureaucracy no one interviewed had heard of the Conference (see chapter 4), nor could they discover whether Oman was a signatory; none of the respondents (see chapters 4, 6, 7 and 8) mentioned Salamanca. Had there been any qualitative impact then such lack of awareness would be unlikely.

1.5: Conclusion

Oman is unique even within the context of the other Gulf states. Despite the modernizations which have been implemented since 1970, there remains a natural conservatism that may hamper attempts to learn from other states' educational – and specifically SEN – experiences. To a certain extent this conservatism is generative in that it is an effective bulwark against the cultural imperialism of the 21st century, preserving ideologies and traditions which might elsewhere be threatened. In terms of education, and particularly SENs, such inwardness may not always be a good basis on which to build an inclusive Omani pedagogy. There is no flow of ideas from NGOs, UNESCO workshops or even the government's own Pilot Project on inclusion, and so awareness of SENs remains limited in the short to medium-terms.

This chapter contextualises Omani educational provision. It lists those ministries and those organizations most closely linked to SEN provision. It provides an account of the *formal* SEN discourse in Oman. There are four key themes or sets of tensions: Omanization, and the shortage in some areas of Omani teachers; remaining inadequacies in educational and SEN provision for a young and swiftly growing population; the significant presence of congenital problems, and a lack of understanding of their origins; finally a psychomedicalized discourse that does not match emerging international discourses which look to integration and inclusion as a way forward in SEN provision.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTS, TERMINOLOGY, CATEGORIES AND DILEMMAS IN SEN

Oman and the Middle East generally are under-researched in terms of SEN and disablement. Therefore the researcher is in an invidious position because this lack of background work necessitates a borrowing from literature that is Western – a literature which does not always do justice to the Omani context. Sometimes some of the arguments in the literature may do violence to the character of what is happening in Oman and other similar countries by failing to acknowledge the validity of local discourses, or by considering provision within a one-size-fits-all philosophy.

Nevertheless it is important to gain conceptual clarity around the key concepts, terminologies, categories and dilemmas in the field of SEN. This is going to be important in understanding the later empirical work and indeed the overall arguments of the thesis. This chapter therefore looks at the construction and definitions of SEN, or specifically the way these are constructed and defined in the West.

A key dilemma is that Western literature may not always be appropriate, and, even where it appears to be so, may not fully fit or be applicable to the Omani situation. Contexts are not identical and research in Oman is only in its infancy. Education research in Oman is at a different phase from that in the Middle East, and more specifically the Gulf states. In contrast to some Western governments, Gulf governments are less open about their aims and may be designedly opaque; this attitude filters down and comes to characterize societies. While examinations of education in other similar nations (Hean and Garrett,

2001) may be useful, the uniqueness of the Omani context means there can only be suggestions not definitions from Western points of view.

2.1: Constructing and understanding SEN

Special needs are understood in very different ways in different contexts and settings – even a short review of the available literature will suggest this is a controversial and subjective field containing many paradigms (Lipsky and Gartner, 1989). The term SEN is "an umbrella term describing a wide range of difficulties which may impair children's ability to achieve during their time in school" (Stakes and Hornby, 2000: 2) and so the term could be of less value in many contexts. Any application of a term without precision may lead to improper use; a damaging prospect, since improper use may lead to inappropriate classroom treatment.

In the UK, the Warnock Committee (Warnock, 1978) concerned itself with the "interaction between the child and the learning contexts which the child experiences" (Beveridge 1999: 4); a child's needs could no longer be viewed separately from the contexts in which the learning occurs, and generating an appropriate environment to support learning was the aim of the Committee. Rather than just locating the learning difficulty within the child, which was the traditional approach, Warnock began the process of identifying broader factors that contribute to SEN. Although there are certain factors within a child which might affect its learning in certain ways, an interactive concept "allows us to view a child's needs as a result of a mismatch between the knowledge, skills and experiences they bring to their learning situations and the demands

that are made of them" (Beveridge 1999: 4), a useful conceptualisation of SEN – and one generated almost entirely by Warnock. Thus "educational difficulties which children experience can only be fully understood by reference to the contexts in which they arise", and these will include the "attitudes and expectations of others, the type of support, knowledge and understanding that they experience at home, at school and in the local community" (Beveridge 1999: 7). In addition to parental involvement, good home/school connections play a role in the child's learning capabilities. However, Beveridge does not look into the wider political and social influences, nor acknowledge the role of policy in SEN provision, nor indeed the wider economic issues (Berlack and Berlack, 1981).

Although the focus of this study is on special *educational* needs, the SEN category is a subset of more general special needs, and is a concept which has its origins in nineteenth and twentieth century perspectives (Hurt 1988: 92, 107, 127). These interpretations and terms may reflect attitudes deeply rooted in society (Zola, 1993), for example the racist categorization of Down's Syndrome as "mongolism" which "reveals atavistic fears aroused by the debate on the origins of mankind taking place at the time Dr Langdon Down gave his [defining] lecture" (Hurt 1988: 119). But, occasionally, early interpretations show great foresight (Kanner 1964: 94), and interestingly, considering developments following 1933, to a greater extent in Weimar Germany than in the UK. However, at the heart of many labels and definitions are those predominantly medical or psychological discourses that govern SEN provision, and which do so in a particularly reductionist manner (Poplin, 1985; 1988a; Holden, 1990) (see chapter 6).

It should be recognised that the interpretation of SEN will continue to reflect social and cultural biases of one sort or another (Söder, 1989). Merely because a researcher may share an ideological view which uses definitions that reject earlier definitions, does not mean that the result in terms of nomenclature is more rational or advanced for example than earlier medical definitions of Down's syndrome as "mongolism". The same psychomedical (pseudo-scientific) discourse (Slee, 1998) often dominates because it is long established and has the support of a range of powerful professionals (Clark, Dyson and Milward, 1998). Since this discourse is based on political and scientific interpretations of the world, and these interpretations are prone to the stresses of power and influence (Foucault, 1975), it may be difficult to challenge. Western psychomedical discourses may find it difficult to adjust views of SEN to differing social contexts or types of development (Arendt, 1992; Harvey, 1989).

Modern communication and the availability of cheap and swift global travel within the reach of a significant and increasing number of people – though still small in terms of the total global population – must have an effect on the way societies develop, the way people define themselves and their surroundings, and how they come to be defined (McQuail, 1976). Understanding disability, and specifically SEN, is not the preserve of a single disciple or a single government ministry: Paul [et al] (1996) stress the importance of a holistic approach to understanding special education, and demonstrate how many variables there may be.

Croll and Moses (1985) offer a new estimation of the incidence of SEN (bringing it up from Warnock's 10% closer to 20% of those in education), and more sensitive methods of categorisation. Since those with SEN are not a tiny sub-section of school society, it may be logical, or more equitable, to re-evaluate their potential and social position: it is no longer simply a question of considering a tiny minority to be dealt with by tweaking existing educational structures, or perhaps by being relegated or forgotten. Of course this should not suggest that a greater percentage grants greater legitimacy; if there were only one student with SEN they would have the same rights to education as if there were 5 million. However, it might help encourage those who persist in having negative perceptions of SEN to change their habits of thought if they are forced to reconsider difference as the norm (Ball, 1990a).

Despite relativism, a definition of SEN was attempted in the UK Education Act, 1996.

> A child is defined as having special educational needs if she or he has a learning difficulty which needs special teaching. A learning difficulty means that the child has significantly greater difficulty in learning than most children of the same age. Or it means a child has a disability which needs different educational facilities from those that schools generally provide for children of the same age in the area. (DfES, Chapter 56: IV, 2001)

The link with liberating political and social ideologies underlies Beveridge's more inclusive view of SEN.

> All children can be regarded as having special needs of some kind during their school career, and there are few of us who, when looking back at our own time as

pupils, cannot recollect particular instances where we experienced difficulties in learning or in social contexts. (Beveridge 1999: 1)

It might be said that this creates something of a paradox: the study of SEN presupposes an identifiable group diagnosed with needs because they are, in some way, considered "disadvantaged" in educational terms (Tomlinson, 1982). However, if all those in education suffer at some point from a disadvantage, what is the baseline of disability studies? This paradox may be overcome by suggesting that definitions are almost always artificial to some extent. SEN quite probably drifts into grey areas which are usually unrecognised – the fallacy of the false dichotomy - either normal or abnormal; able or disabled - needs always to be remembered (Oliver, 1990).

With this in mind, one might ask what exactly may constitute a recognizable and definable SEN? While Hegarty prefers a wide categorisation - anyone with learning or adjustment difficulties (Hegarty, 1993) - others argue it is more appropriate to refer only to "individual educational needs" (Hart, 1996; Beveridge, 1999), which may be considered less useful in terms of an examination of teacher training. While a study such as this examining SEN and teacher training in Oman must account for labelling, it may be better to simplify some areas in order to create clarity. In the case of studying Omani conditions, there also may not be available the luxury of intricate diagnosis of identification since, as the analysis of the interviews shows, conceptualization remains underdeveloped when contrasted with Western perspectives. Nevertheless understanding labels and their uses or abuses within SEN creates an environment for analysis: Hart (1988), Booth (1998) and Beveridge (1999), like Farrell (2001), believe that labelling

children can lead to "stigmatisation, devaluing and a negative emphasis on difference" (Beveridge 1999: 11), building on Warnock's (1978) approach to labelling as the enemy of inclusion.

But stigma (Corbett, 1996) can exist even if there is no official terminology, so "rather than seeking to abandon the label of SEN … it may be a more effective strategy to tackle questions of stigma by giving explicit recognition to individual difference and by celebrating diversity" (Beveridge 1999: 12). This suggests that understanding, identifying and meeting the needs of those with SEN has to come within a broader educational strategy recognised by all those involved. At its broadest, this has to celebrate diversity across all spectra of human beings – not only those identified as having SEN or those identified as educationally normal, if such latter category exists (Reed and Watson, 1994). There cannot be SEN provision without the establishment of an ideological frame. DeValenzuela, Connery and Musanti (2000: 111-120) summarize this succinctly.

> Without a theoretically rounded understanding of the systematic and systemic ways that access to best practices are facilitated or denied, teachers are left adrift in an ever-shifting and incomprehensible current of influences. (DeValenzuela et al 2000: 114)

Such an understanding may be directed specifically towards the framework for teacher training and the implementation of teaching practice, but can also be widened to show how problematic identifying SEN may be, creating tensions between individual teachers, schools, bureaucracies and TTCs, and could be especially difficult in the contexts of states with young educational structures. In Oman, for example, there may be a belief that

practice can simply be applied without any systematic reorganisation of educational philosophy (see chapters 6 and 7), no real admission of the need to adjust pedagogic paradigms. As DeValenzuela et al (2000) suggest, this belief, which is perhaps less a belief than a restricted perception, leads only to less adequate practice, wasted resources, and further failure by students throughout the educational system.

Any concept is going to change as the social context it describes and exists within changes (Foucault, 1975). The concept of SEN is socially constructed and changes in the light of political and economic shifts, and by more general expectations of how children should develop educationally (Beveridge, 1999). What is less easy to explain is how education policy can be made to account for present and future changes – especially since policy must, in some senses, be responsible for such changes (see chapter 7) (Fulcher, 1999) – despite its contradictions and ambiguities (Bowe et al, 1992).

Beveridge recognizes the significant role of teachers and schools as they alleviate or add to a child's educational difficulties (Beveridge, 1999). At times, teachers have not recognized the effect that school structures, organizations and teaching methods - that is, in total, the educational discourses that surround a student - may have on a child's learning. This lack of awareness is certainly true of pedagogy in Oman (Al Belushi, 2003). Instead, teachers may "blame" the child when it experiences learning difficulties, or the home if the child has emotional or learning difficulties. Failure to adapt discourses at a local and national level must be partly the fault of educators (Croll and Moses, 1985).

Ainscow (1995a) and Clark et al (1997) find that some teachers emphasize the deficits of children and/or their families deficits, a process which focus attention – and criticism – away from education providers. There may also be too little or too great a distinction made between sensory, physical and emotional needs. While it is useful to have a more rounded picture of SEN than one merely based on what a school can or cannot do to promote the education of its students, any a tendency of teachers to deflect blame or responsibility by redefining SEN in terms of domestic deficits can be damaging. A perspective on SEN has to absorb aspects of failure or need at all points in a child's development. It should also be remembered that it may not be useful either to cast research in ways which at best ignore teachers, and at worst alienate them. Paul (1996) and Paul and Epanchin (1996) show the benefits in the development of ideas *in practice* - and a real advance in the understanding of the ideology of SEN - examining new rules of practice between the University of Southern Florida and Professional Development Schools (PDS) in a school-based Teacher Education Partnership (TEP). This avoids digging an ideological trench dividing teachers and theorists in SEN by involving both with each other and with the practicalities of meeting SEN (Paul and Epanchin, 1996: 106).

This first section presents an overview of the key ideas that dominate Western SEN and its provision, establishing an idea of how practice is informed by theory. The next section will look more closely at one of the most used tools of provision, the labels applied to those with SEN and the range of specialized terminology emanating from and maintained by various professionals.

2.2: Terminology / labelling and categorization

As with any concept applied to real people with real needs, definitions – even very basic ones – will vary, while also arousing some antagonisms. The first consideration should be whether the term "special educational needs" is useful or relevant, or indeed part of a nest of disempowering jargon (Casling, 1993) or a condescending and limiting language (Ball, 1990a; Clements, 2001). As Fulcher (1999) suggests, it is possible to see terms – even those as apparently neutral as SEN – as part of a wider policy discourse which identifies and traps individuals within a crude and need-orientated definition of disablement (Corbett, 1996).

Understanding the relativistic nature of any definition involves developing an awareness of the possible inadequacy of current terminologies, while also having a feeling for the continuity which stretches backwards to the institutionalization or dismissal of those with special needs and forwards perhaps to complete inclusion or some, as yet undefined variant of comprehensive education. There is also a need to stress the variation between societies in the construction, understanding and treatment of SEN, and recognize that no single approach may be sensible: educational provision can never be a "one size fits all" discipline.

The International League of Societies for Persons with Mental Handicap's directory categories of disability (Bruoillette, 1993) is a useful summary of commonly used expressions and terms, while simultaneously recording the percentage of countries that recognise such categories. It is worthwhile noting that while visual impairment comes top

of the list in this directory, in Oman the recognition of blindness as a disability is hampered by greater prejudice than other disabilities (see chapters 1.4 and 6.2.1).

Table 2. 1: Recognized categories of disability

Disability served	Number of Countries N = 152	Percentage of Countries N = 152
Visually impaired	121	80%
Hearing impaired	116	76%
Mentally retarded	120	79%
Physically impaired	106	70%
Emotionally disturbed	74	49%
Speech impaired	46	30%
Learning disabled	26	17%
Gifted and talented	06	04%

(from Brouillette, 1993: 31)

One thing immediately obvious from this table is the simplification created by any categorization of disability: to recognize, initially and in some contexts, is also to simplify. When, for example, visual impairment began to be considered a disablement worthy of some level of medical or educational consideration in Oman – and there are still deficits in Oman's treatment in this area (Haddidi, 1998) – the first attempt at categorization would probably have been a simple one: can this person see or not? Variations and complexities of reductions in sight, including the common Omani condition, trachoma, were initially ignored, and this may happen because of

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organizational phenomena (Mehan, 1984; Jarvis, 1972; Hargreaves, 1983). As categories for treatment or education are created (see chapter 6.1), it may simply be easier to "round off the edges" by including those with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) with those experiencing forms of schizophrenia. Even these terms are in ideological flux, cause dispute and must artificially lump together a whole spectrum of variation and difference, much of which may be crucial to effective education. It should also be recognised that some children have differences which cannot presently be easily categorised, or which escape categorization because they are not visible through the psychomedical spectacles frequently worn by professionals (Fulcher, 1999). Also, links between these categories, (for example, someone who is visually impaired *and* has emotional difficulties) cannot be simply described. Finally, categorization may ignore differing causes, solutions and coincidences of perception – perhaps between those described as "mentally retarded" and those as "learning disabled" – but nonetheless offer a start to the perception and understanding of SEN (Brouillette, 1992; 1993).

When comparing nations, just because some categories are not recognized, it does not follow that services for those with SEN do not exist; or that recognition of special needs categories is "inadequate" (Brouillette,1993). However, it is difficult to conceive, in general, that a need can be met without some sort of social recognition of the category of that need – blindness might be an Omani case in point (see chapter 1.4).

In UK terms, the largest changes in identification, naming, categorization as well as deconstructing extant categories and thus recognition followed the Warnock Report

(1978). As time passes it may be inevitable that definitions of SEN become more complex or more specialized – reflecting the specialisms associated with and growing departmentalization of disablement. Paul, Epanchin, Roseselli and Duchnowski (1996) project the entire field of special needs as rapidly undergoing reappraisal in the light of advances in other disciplines. Inter-cultural comparisons may also serve to improve understanding of some of the categories used.

Although specific comparisons between terminologies are made later (see chapter 4.3), in the context of legislation developed in the UK it is important to recognize the impact of linguistic categorization. In Oman, traditional linguistic signifiers such as "retarded" or "feeble minded" continue to relegate those with SEN to a lower status (see chapter 6.2.2): the term "mentally retarded" ("mutakhalif agliyan") still carries connotations of shame. "Retardation" may mean something considerably different for Finns, who see it as a positive term, simply suggesting a state of being held back from achieving full potential. The Finnish Association for Mental Retardation (FAMR) see the term "learning difficulties" as much more negative since for them it suggests a more permanent state of affairs (www.kehitysvammaliitto.fi accessed 7.04.2005).

SEN has been divided by the English Teachers Network in Israel (ETNI) (www.etni.org.il/index accessed 24.09.2001) into six categories. It should be noted that (4) and (6) are not regarded as SEN categories in the UK.

1. The student has physical differences including visual, aural, oral, motor, or other diagnosable conditions.

2. The student has learning disabilities, and suitable accommodations for these problems have not been identified and used, or the accommodations when applied are insufficient to reach benchmark expectations;
3. The student has behavioural or emotional disorders;
4. The student has difficulties in one or more skill areas as a result of a preferred learning style that is not presently or adequately accommodated in the EFL classroom;
5. The student has environmental or family problems;
6. The student has emigrated from another country, or has grown up in an environment where the language environment is different, and his language acquisition abilities have not been adequately assessed or addressed. (www.etni.org.il/index, accessed 24/09/2001).

Apart from the slightly less disempowering versions that characterize SEN more widely than mere "difficulties" and that move identification towards "difference", these ETNI identifications are also helpful in suggesting that the origins of SEN may be external to the individual student (Hegarty, 1993). Hegarty observes that some methods of identifying SEN can be distorting; a critical observation when considering SEN in the contexts of developing societies such as Oman.

> ...[T]he child would have a learning difficulty and therefore a special educational need if living in the catchment area of one of the schools but not if living in the catchment area of the other. Apart from the anomaly, what this language is doing is transferring a feature of school architecture into something the child *has*. (Hegarty, 1993: 47)

The ETNI identifications also have direct relevance to developing states' needs (especially points 4, 5 and 6) and those needs of regions with significant immigration. Part of the practical usefulness of any system of categorization is that it should be widely understood, and not only by educational professionals.

In the Omani context the ETNI identifications are particularly important to bear in mind since similar needs arise pedagogically – the importance of English as a second language specifically. However, there are still problems with categorizing and identifying language: "difficulties" and "disorders" may not always be useful terms, because those who have SENs of one kind or another, or those who teach or care for them, may not see such needs as disabilities but rather as differences – these are words and concepts that dominate the interviews and their analyses (chapters 6, 7 and 8). Categorizations – labels which define educational, psychological and physical differences (Clements, 2001; Corbett, 1996; Söder, 1989; Armstrong, 2003) – generate the self images of those with SEN (Christensen and Rizvi, 1996: 63). Pathologization of SEN and overt medicalization (Poplin, 1988a; Fulcher, 1999: 21) may well determine levels of exclusion (chapter 6.1) and express relationships of power (Foucault, 1990). The medical discourse remains strong and persuasive because the discourse is easy to apply to disability. There is a history of medicalization which has been described as authoritarian (Pendleton and Hasler, 1983) and exclusive by the use of a complex almost priestly discourse (Borsay, 1986). Thus, there is an exclusivity of power generated among a small group of elite practitioners, and by association among some SEN specialists, which explains the continued dominance of the psychomedical model (Clark, Dyson and Milward, 1998; Slee, 1998).

Educators need to respond to the child with SEN as a pupil with rights promoting "positive attitudes, values and behaviour among their peers" (Beveridge 1999:13); a pupil is a whole only in the context of its full history and environment. Labelling (Kirk, 1975)

is one significant barrier between the disabled and education. Booth (1998) believes that using a term such as SEN may locate a particular problem within a child rather than trying to find out what are the barriers to learning for the individual. When a child is described as having SEN does this suggest or automatically invoke psychological, physiological or social barriers? Terms, by their positioning within exclusive linguistic sets, resist change by their presence: to encourage change means to alter the terminology within a dominant discourse.

The shift in the use of terms was apparent as early as the 1987 Regular Education Initiative (REI) (Reynolds, Wang and Walberg 1987) where language was recognized as political; "physically separate education was inherently discriminatory and inequitable" (Kavale and Forness 2000: 281). There has, therefore, been a parallel shift in the way people *think* about SEN, certainly in the UK and across Western nations generally, and the emphasis is now powerfully political. In this climate, the criticisms of government educational reforms by Heller and Schilit (1987) Lieberman (1985) and Kauffman, Gerber and Semmel (1988) all suggest that any SEN provision comes with political baggage which should be born in mind. In terms of Oman this means an even greater gulf between Western discourse and current or potential Omani practice. It should not be thought that unfavourable parallels are being drawn between the West and developing nations (Haddidi, 1998); best practice is a very subjective concept.

As Hadidi (1998) suggests, thinking in Oman has not developed within the academic and teaching communities sufficiently for inclusion as a concept to make the leap effectively

from ministry to classroom (see chapters 6 and 7). Since inclusion is at its essence a process reflecting a society's interpretation of various rights, and how and where these may be allocated, can there be parity between states whose concepts of rights are widely different? Is it possible to suggest that paucity of SEN provision, instead of reflecting a political or social deficit, reflects a different interpretation of the relationship between government and governed – and a different relationship between concept and policy (Ozga, 2000) (see chapter 8)?

A broad construction of SEN provides a strong ideological basis for inclusion as a pragmatic and reasonable practice, but may also suggest how negative labelling may be (Farrell, 2001). Labelling, even of a positive or neutral kind, may still create stigma as a result of identification and thus lead to the separation of individuals in the context of a corporate school or peer identity. The use of negative labelling, perhaps as the pathologizing of difference, is only the most obvious of a range of labelling where care should be taken (Billington, 2000), but definitions can become what Corbett (1995) calls "bad mouthing" very easily. It is also important to know who might benefit from systems of categorization (Armstrong et al., 2000). The use of categories can never be detailed enough in their general use to take account of the complexity of SEN – especially in contexts such as Oman where there are many social, racial, linguistic and other variables.

Labelling is a burden, and may sometimes displace problems from institutions such as ministries and schools to children. Frostig (1976) offers a good illustration of the struggle over the word "problem" – an ambivalence that suggests a paucity of pedagogic

awareness (6.3.1). Roaf and Bines (1989), in contrast, view the concept of SEN as conferring equal rights and opportunities on students. Again, this is part of the ideology of inclusion expressed by Warnock (1978) and directly linked to a growing belief in the need to create a society which is defined by diversity, rather than in spite of it. It is important to understand that Oman, although diverse, is not necessarily a society which would seek to define itself in this way: Oman does not see itself as a "rainbow nation" as South Africa does. If SEN can only be met within a wider ideological frame where inclusion of all kinds – not only of SENs – is a preferred practice in most situations, Oman, like every other country, still has some way to travel.

Interpretations of normality and deviance (Ball, 1990a; Oliver, 1990) could be constructed within a more inclusive and logical frame than one which labels a majority as normal, and a minority as somehow "deviant" because they are disabled (a common perception among the respondents in chapters 6, 7 and 8). There is no point at which humanness ends; all those in a population are human, all are unique, and their differences could more effectively be recognised and accommodated in legislation. Educational provision starts from a positive – a hope for achievement – rather than a premature admission of failure. It is doubtful whether the ideology of inclusion – and the wider ideology which seeks to abandon notions of normal and abnormal – enjoys a wide consensus within the UK or anywhere else. There are of course certain social groups, perhaps those engaged in research at institutions of higher education, which may like to think of themselves as part of an ideologically and culturally inclusive society; but, in turn, these groups may have a heightened awareness of the policy/practice disjunction.

This abandonment of negative terms becomes more difficult with categories such as "emotionally disturbed" or "mentally retarded". But even here both Brouillette (1993) and Hurt (1988) could more readily adopt Miles (1982) and Bowe's (1981) redefinition of SEN in terms of influential consumer or pressure groups which have themselves the ability to "shift their position forward with remarkable speed" (Miles, 1982: 9). Negative terminology is often equated with or suggests powerlessness: Miles' suggestions for empowerment are an effective counter to negative labels recognizing that there are few groups in society without access to some political or commercial power. His suggestions also draw attention to those power complexes that shape pedagogy (Bernstein, 2000) and society (Foucault, 1990). Categorising according to a system which suggests disempowerment fails to notice how things have changed, and will continue to change. Self-advocacy movements have grown up on the back of political changes which assert the right to make needs known. Perhaps "needs" become "rights" in these discourses. The danger explicit in the term SEN is that a relationship between those who need and those who provide simply perpetuates the unequal relationships within society at a whole (Armstrong, 2000: 10). An analysis of SEN, or of disability in general, should recognize that the state and its organizations are in a power relationship with the public (Foucault, 1975; 1977). If this is not recognised, then it is likely that needs will always retain a sense of imposed dependency (Oliver, 1990). Armstrong illustrates that concepts of needs may indeed be disempowering: "While the state is conceptualised as a neutral regulatory body, analysis of the social practices by which marginalized social interests are reproduced as 'needs' is inhibited." (Armstrong, 2000: 10-11)

2.2.1: Use of terminology in the context of this thesis

It is clear, from the semantic acrobatics used to define SENs and associated ideas, that clarity in the academic field and in the classroom is besieged by problems of defining and de-mystifying without ghettoizing and reducing (Casling, 1993; Slee, 1993). While SEN, as a category, has been used to define the educational position of those students with disabilities which may inhibit their access to and benefit from education, the researcher constantly uses Warnock's (1978) position that all students have some need which is special as a philosophical foundation. However, this position is not useful in the analysis of interviews of those whose conceptualizations of the subject may not be clear, easily translatable, or readily accessible. Despite Corbett's (1995) description of the negativity of labelling of all kinds, it is exactly this process of categorizing and pathologizing (Billington, 2000) that, when coded and analysed, creates a window into the discourses that govern SEN and teacher training in Oman.

The researcher therefore recognized the usefulness of terms such as "SEN" and "disability" in the context of description and the beginnings of provision in the Omani context. The additional use of other terms such as "mentally retarded" (see chapter 6.3.1) or "blind" and "deaf" was made because these were part of the vocabulary of interviewees, and with an eye to data collection (see chapter 5.1) in an environment where the variety of labels for those with SEN often have negative and reductive connotations.

Finally terminology such as "integration" and "inclusion" – both translated as the Arabic /demj/ (see chapter 4.3.3) – was admitted to be imprecise because the ideas behind the terminology had not been adequately worked through. For example, the Pilot Project (see chapter 1.4.6) is an example of /demj/ trialled in a mainstream environment, but respondents were either awkward with or unaware of the meaning.

Overall the thesis uses "SEN" (and to a lesser extent "disability") as a categorization while recognizing its philosophical and descriptive inadequacies. The categorization is useful only as a way of helping identify a group whose rights are not fully met, and identifying it as a focus of thought in the interviews. The thesis refers to and uses "integration" and "inclusion" both in their precise meanings and in the context of the less precise and more opaque concept of /demj/. Other labels occur because they exist on the ground in the naming of the three special schools (see chapter 5) or because they are part of the language of the respondents, determined by their ideologies and sustained by the dominant social discourses (Zola, 1993) – a prime example of a label or categories like this would be "deviant" and "normal" (see chapter 6.2). In each case the design is to describe the use of such terminology as neutrally and constructively as possible.

2.3: Integration and inclusion – two dominant concepts in Western orthodoxy

Integration is often used to describe practical infrastructural changes – for example, the adaptation of a building to meet the needs of disabled students; the nature of school reform and the timetabling of supplementary teaching (Hegarty, 1993); its opposite is segregation. Inclusion has an ideological dimension, and is used to denote changes in the

way people think of those with SEN. "Inclusion … is about cultural synergies for an ever-broadening range of human identities" (Armstrong 2000: 134) Integration is often used in both senses (Hegarty, 1993), and, sometimes, the words seem almost synonymous and interchangeable. This reflects a certain amount of confusion even among professionals (see chapter 4). Hurt (1988: 100), referring to the Warnock Report (1978) and the 1976 Education Act, uses integration to mean the physical process of adding those with SEN to mainstream education, or not, as needs dictated (Hurt, 1988). Integration is, to paraphrase Branson and Miller (1989), a concept which sees SEN as "problems" to be dealt with through assimilation (Armstrong, 2000: 134). In Arabic the word for both inclusion and integration is "demj" – there is no distinction made. In this research, the English words will be differentiated, but in an attempt to reflect the nuances of the use of the word "demj" in context (see chapter 4.2.1).

Inclusive educational discourses do not consider SEN to be a "problem" to be dealt with by assimilationist policies.

> Inclusive education is really a process of people inquiring into their own context to see how it can be developed and it is a process of growth. It is a social process and it engages people in making sense of their experience and helping one another to question their experience and their context to see how things can be moved forward. (Mel Ainscow, interviewed in Armstrong, 2000: 136)

The concept of inclusion may have an even more problematic application in the Omani context, where attitudes to those with SEN in most cases remain one of exclusion with occasional "lapses" towards limited inclusion – depending on the specific SEN. There

may be many reasons for this, but few special schools, no continuity of study for those returning from special schools abroad (Giddens, 1998; Woodward, 1997), lack of resources, lack of current research at SQU or at any dedicated organisations all play a part in maintaining an atmosphere of exclusion (Haddidi, 1998). There is also the same kind of educational administrative inadequacy observed in the US by Milofsky (1986). Because of these deficits it may be difficult to apply the concept of inclusion to the Omani context. In the UK inclusion has evolved through years of ideological development involving the political desire to include those of different racial, cultural and religious backgrounds in the mainstream – whatever that may be exactly; the empowerment of women and abandonment of perceptions of deviance for those of different sexual orientation; the reconsideration of issues of authority. This evolutionary struggle was and is contested by many educators (Cornulti, 1998). There are major differences in the field between those who see inclusion as a panacea and those who see it as, at best, a red herring, and at worst wrong-minded (Kavale and Forness, 2000; Ainscow 1995). These are slow and frequently difficult developments to experience.

SEN and inclusion are strongly linked in much Western literature in the field, the assumption being that one leads to the other. Arguments against the ideology of inclusion are rare amongst those dedicated, or who have dedicated themselves, or who have sought to be identified as a group in meeting SEN. Kavale and Forness (2000) suggest that the ideological shift has not yet stopped, and there is a link between inclusion as a practice and desegregation. They also suggest that the situation in the EU – and especially the UK – may be one in which the SEN debate has shifted towards acknowledging full inclusion

as the Holy Grail; so that objective educational considerations may have been supplanted by political and ideological discourses.

It may be that only in the context of such inclusiveness can the identification of SEN, and thus the provision of the most appropriate help and allocation of the best resources, be reasonable and thorough. Both Roaf (1989) and, later, Beveridge (1999) point up problems of creating an ideology of diversity for SEN. "To ignore differences altogether or to pay too much attention to irrelevant differences are both equally unjust" (Beveridge 1999: 12), implying that there is a need to strike a balance when identifying a child and considering its best interests. But a balance may itself be recognition of the difficulties of reconciling bureaucracies and people (Mehan, 1984). A system of identification cannot be so thorough that it atomizes school society, since that would also waste resources by looking too deeply at those differences which either cannot be dealt with inclusively, or should be ignored as too personal to be relevant to the practical challenges of education and pedagogy. What may be crucial is not the label SEN itself but rather the "clarification of its distinction from other forms of educational need" (Beveridge, 1999: 12).

The development of SEN as a term used over the modern period (Brouillette, 1993: 31) marks out its progress from being a social objective which is to *force* an adaptation of variation towards some kind of normality and the current recognition of diversity as a political ideal.

2.4: Cross-national constructions

From what has so far been discussed it is obvious there is a key tension in clarifying the conceptual background to this thesis. That is, most of the work – empirical and theoretical – in the field derives from Western nations. The situation in Oman and other similar nations is different, and in this short section some of the issues of cross-national differences will be explored.

Brouillette (1993) lists six hypotheses which help clarify cross-national differences affecting the number and type of children with disabilities, and the quality of the services they receive.

1. **The need hypothesis**: basically this suggests that the number of children in need of special services will influence the numbers receiving these services; this is straightforward: need is dictated by numbers.
2. **The demand hypothesis**: predicts that it is not just the presence of large numbers of children with SEN; but rather that demand is generated by greater awareness, and ideological change within society, which may begin to see those hitherto deemed "uneducable" as equally worthy of education. It is important to note – especially within the unique Omani situation – that demand is a factor of education and wealth: middle class parents are more likely to be able to demand effectively.
3. **The educational effort hypothesis**: this posits an increase in demand as greater effort is put into SEN within schools. Clearly what would happen is that

awareness and available facilities would generate awareness among parents, students and other teachers.

4. **The resource hypothesis**: the size of resources will affect the number of those defined as having SEN.
5. **The keeping-up-with-the-Joneses hypothesis**: at a local level one school may feel inferior if a neighbouring school offers better SEN provision; nationally, if one EU state does better than another this could encourage bureaucratic change.
6. **The developmental stage hypothesis**: as society develops and changes, so this drives forward complementary changes in SEN provision. However this hypothesis (much like the crude economic hypotheses from which it is borrowed (Rostow, 1959)) suggests that any "take off" point in the development of comprehensive education will be reached when there are simultaneously encouraging social, political and economic factors. This may have particular importance when thinking about SEN and developing nations such as Oman (see chapter 9.5).

Oman's stage of socio-economic development may well have a direct influence on how many students are diagnosed – SEN is prone to the luxury of available resources. Brouillette's "developmental stage" hypothesis (directly borrowed from stage three of Rostow's (1959) five classifications of stages through which, according to his anti-Marxist hypothesizing, an economy passes) "states that an interactive combination of social, economic and political factors must exist in order for a nation to reach the 'take off' point in the development of comprehensive education that is the right of all disabled

children and others living on the fringes of society" (Brouillette, 1993: 35). Growing economies develop on unequal bases; parts remain underdeveloped and some economic sectors fail to develop together; some may even be repressed by external pressures (Stiglitz, 2002). The resources necessary for social services including education are limited, even in an oil economy such as Oman's. There is little history of cooperation between crucial government departments, or even between different university departments and schools – although this is changing; teacher training remains underdeveloped (especially with regards to SEN – see chapters 6 and 7); the necessary levels of staffing have not been reached and, finally, social tolerance of those who are not considered "normal" is low.

Just as global inequalities in terms of effectively recognized rights, freedoms and wealth remain immense, there is also a wide disparity in global policy attitudes to disability (Potts et al 1995; Armstrong et al, 2000). Even in the EU in the 1990s television audiences were shocked by the images from institutions in Romania for the care of mentally handicapped children – though perhaps in that context care is hardly the right word. There have always been wide disparities in quality and type of treatment between developed countries – Sweden continued sterilising those with mental handicaps until the 1970s – and even between regions of developed countries.

The influences on the treatment of disability, and especially on the provision of education to those with SEN, are likely to be many. Primarily the influence must be one of resources, and resources depend on wealth. Secondly the influence must be one of

cultural priority: are disabled people stigmatised (Kisanji, 1993)? Thirdly, is there the political will towards some level of integration of SEN students into the educational mainstream? Finally, is there the political, social, philosophical and economic environment necessary to move from provision, through integration towards inclusion?

2.5: Conclusion

The international context is very much like the classroom itself: it is a community of differences, where the weakest are obscured by the strongest. If total inclusion suits Italy well (Cornulti, 1998) it may not suit or be possible in India or Saudi Arabia. Different solutions to the problem of educating an entire population should not, necessarily, be judged as better or worse by Western standards. Global developments in SEN provision may now become increasingly affected by globalisation of cultural, political and economic institutions, and there may, in this context, be some degree of cultural imperialism (Said, 2003). Oman has its own unique political (Chatty, 1996) and politico-economic problems (Martey, 1999) (see chapter 7.2), but whether these uniquenesses will be encouraged and strengthened or weakened, allowed to develop or be obscured, depends partly on the nature of the dominant global discourses. Even among the so-called developed nations there is no "norm" when it comes to SEN provision (Armstrong, 2000), but, clearly, a contradiction of opinions. However, since most developed nations do share crucial egalitarian notions, integration has given way to the recognition of inclusion as a goal, at least among some – but not all – theoreticians (Kavale and Forness, 2000). From the point of view of disabled people developed nations still have a long way to go before anything like true equality of access to all the facilities offered by society

can be enjoyed: people in wheelchairs still cannot use the majority of London tube stations, and the estimate for complete access is 2020.

There are also those philosophical differences between political parties which may help or hinder equality of access. There remain strong assimilationist tendencies within centre and right wing European parties, while too often description of those with SEN of all kinds – or indeed more widely of disablement generally – is linked to deficit and "treatment" (Barton, 1987). To read some theoretical discussions one might think that the argument for inclusion had been won, and that difference was to be celebrated rather than dealt with: this is not so. Much education remains standardized, and standardization never celebrates difference.

It may be better, therefore, not to think of SEN provision on the Western model (Brouillette, 1993). Community-based rehabilitation (CBR) is already working with over 50% of WHO member states, while the influence of the Portage model (Shearer and Shearer, 1972) to help early development of those with a range of mental handicaps has proved positive in raising development and social quotients in projects in Jamaica (Brouillette, 1993) and elsewhere (Brouillette and Brouillette, 1992). The Portage experiment is an important one for SEN provision. (Shearer and Shearer, 1972) It was initiated in the early 1960s in the US for under-6 year old children with the overall aim of raising abilities. Families were considered to be early and crucial partners in education: not only were children's skills monitored, but also the families themselves gained important insights into the education process (Brouillette, 1993).

There may be a link between the way nationhood develops and the way attitudes to those who do not approximate to a social norm are open to change or to being changed. A stress on unity and similarity (on shared characteristics and goals) may be more important and comprehensible than stress on diversity – though modern South Africa may be an example to test this. The dominant attitudes within a society (Kisanji, 1993; Hegarty, 1998) and the need for enlightenment about SEN are dependent on a government's willingness to put resources into the necessary education.

In-service training (IST) is one example of resources that may not only be poorly provided but also poorly demanded. If as Al Belushi (2003) suggests teachers' careers are vulnerable to social and political pressures, so their wish to use and benefit from IST, even in the SEN sector, cannot be taken for granted. Weiss (1999) suggests a need for institutional support for the provision of IST, rather than relying on the enterprising natures of individual teachers. Ayyash-Abdo's (2000) study of Arab teachers indicates some lack of initiative, combined with a perception of IST as an unnecessary addition to onerous duties.

Despite Fukuyama's (1993) neo-liberal historical reductionism, national philosophies are not universally applicable. Inclusion is a predominantly Western concept, intensive in terms of costs, staff pupil ratios, bureaucratic innovation, monitoring, and networking education workers with workers in other allied fields as well as parents and carers; it is also intensive ideologically. Developing countries may be more suited to integrationist

rather than inclusive policies (Armstrong et al, 2000). Inclusion is thus very far from a "quick fix" for those nations that need to address problems of lack of SEN provision. The greater standardization enforced by developing governments, as part of the drive to nationhood and modernity, runs contrary to inclusion as a practice, even in developed countries such as Australia (Armstrong et al, 2000).

Thus, in terms of developing states, some of the Salamanca statement (see chapter 1.4.8) – especially those areas concerning decentralization, inclusivity and enhanced communication between those states already experiencing integration and those states in development – may be unworkable. If, for example, there are significant prejudices in a society concerning the disabled, then it may make sense to take the route of segregation in special schools – at least initially (Baine, 1993). Also there are logistical reasons why special schools might work better in some developing contexts: for example in parts of Africa where there are few educational facilities or none at all then the only hope for many with SEN may be a special school. Integration would be counterproductive in a class of more than 100; inclusion would hardly be worth considering. (Kisanji, 1993; Baine, 1993)

This chapter has examined the way SEN is conceptualized. Conceptualizations are important and have consequences for practice and provision. It is necessary to understand what the dominant conceptualizations are in order to see how they work.

Conceptualizations are shaped by what is read and what is known through research, by those things to which we are exposed and by those methods by which we are trained. The

situation in Oman may be at a different point from Western nations for various particular historical reasons, but the tensions that exist between Omani thought and practice and Western thought and practice are what help define provision. It is therefore necessary to move thinking on by understanding the differences between Oman and the EU/UK, or the West in general.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter examines the mixed methodology – both quantitative and qualitative – used in the research. The aim is to clarify the process by which research questions are answered and hypotheses suggested. The chapter moves through the sequence of piloting, data gathering, coding and analysis, examining those issues such as language use and ethics, aspects of which particularly bear upon research in Oman. It looks at the population of those involved with Omani SEN provision and teacher training and explains how this population was sampled and analysed in various ways. The chapter examines the process by which the sample of teachers were given questionnaires at the three special schools and researcher observations were done there, suggesting how the observations work with the questionnaires to offer quantitative background information. The process by which the two main qualitative data sets – one interviewed in 2001 the second in 2003 – were coded and analysed is also examined.

The methodology of the quantitative and qualitative approaches used to explore the topic, although essentially Western, proved very generative. The first phase of the work included a pilot survey which was deployed to help with the design of the questionnaires. The questionnaires and observations at the three special schools concluded this phase of surveying and mapping. The second phase was made up of in-depth qualitative work to focus the research. It began with eight initial interviews in 2001 – the first data set made up mostly of key respondents in the field of education. Then a second set of qualitative interviews was undertaken in 2003 to probe and tease out perspectives of the key social actors in the field of SEN and teacher training in Oman.

There were four research questions born in mind during the process of quantitative and qualitative analysis; these guided the structure of the questionnaires given at the special schools, and the interviews of all respondents, and were the backbone to the process of writing up.

(1) Is there an identifiable set of ideas and practices currently operational among teacher trainers in Oman, and more widely in the pedagogic environment, with regards to SEN? What are the concepts held most widely?

(2) Is it possible to identify a particularity in the process of education policy-making in Oman which may, possibly, be applied to other developing states?

(3) If there are disjunctions between concepts expressed and policies made in teacher training and SEN, what might these be?

(4) Do the experiences of SEN and teacher training articulated in the global literature have relevance to the unique conditions in Oman?

3.1: Approach

The methodology employed was a "mixed" approach, which was broadly qualitative but was informed by a quantitative review (chapter 5); this is also called methodological triangulation, which "involves the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods and data to study the same phenomena within the same study" (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998: 18). The mixed method is what Cresswell (1995) calls a "dominant-less dominant study" where there is "a single dominant [research] paradigm with a small component of

the overall study drawn from an alternative design" (Cresswell, 1995: 177). Overall, the mixed approach is a product "of the pragmatist paradigm … combin[ing] the qualitative and quantitative approaches within different phases of the research process" (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998: 19). The reasons qualitative and quantitative methods were deployed together was in order to cover more of the field, not just accord statistical information to quantitative methods and researcher-based interactivity to qualitative methods (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Rather, the combination or linkage of methodologies, exploring, detailing and deepening by turns, recognizes that "to build dense, well-developed, integrated, and comprehensive theory" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 33) there is a need for an amount of generative interplay between methods.

3.1.1: Quantitative analysis

The quantitative surveys, which were piloted to produce the questionnaires used at the three special schools (chapter 5) would be appropriate in what is a predominantly qualitative research for balance, and as a way of framing the research itself. The surveys were a reliable method to gain a picture of Omani provision (Cohen et al, 2000). As an Omani, specifically an Omani woman with knowledge of and training in education, and whose youngest son can be described as having an SEN (specifically "mild autism"), the interviewer/researcher comes close to a categorization of participant rather than mere observer. Perhaps better described as a "participant observer" (Pole and Lampard, 2002: 70) – though the positioning of researcher is more complex than this might suggest – the researcher's responsibility for data gathering is greater, since "the researcher may also be directly responsible for some of the social action he/she is observing" (Pole and Lampard,

2002: 71). Bearing this in mind, observation via questionnaires and the data they generate helps increase the level of objectivity, and renews a sense of the data field: the danger of familiarity breeding contempt – or at least misperception – is made less likely when the data field is well mapped. (Peräkylä, 2004)

The aim of the questionnaires and observations at the special schools is to contextualize and offer an insight into SEN provision in Oman, unfiltered by the perceptions or discomforts of individuals within the education hierarchy. The observation field notes were an important part of data collection (Patton, 1990) and an important way to contextualize the qualitative work (Yin, 1989). The supplementary use of quantitative data helped with the analysis of the main qualitative data set, by providing an insight into the practices that represent the dominant discourses surrounding SEN provision. This survey and accompanying observational work has proved useful, not only in the provision of more Omani data, which is still meagre, but also to understand the context of the main research through what Cohen (2000) calls an open-ended and inductive approach to eliciting information, and "to discover things that participants might not freely talk about in interview situations, to move beyond perception-based data (eg opinions in interviews), and to access personal knowledge" (Cohen, 2000: 305).

Because of the ease of application, and relative ease of subsequent analysis – in comparison to the more complex process of the qualitative analysis used – surveys in the form of questionnaires are frequently-used academic research tools (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998). A survey is also useful in helping in the coding and interpreting of data

from the interviews, as a way of checking back and gaining perspective; this is how the questionnaire survey was approached, as way to gather data from various people, the "sample" that offers an insight into the wider population of SEN professionals and bureaucrats from which the interview-based data was collected (May, 1993). The populations of possible respondents in each of the three data collection events were never large: the total number of bureaucrats (chapter 4) involved directly or indirectly in SEN provision (or those who have been involved but may have moved on) was probably no greater than 30; the total number of teachers at the three special schools (chapter 5) was – in 2001 – 158 (chapter 5.1); the number of teacher trainers and professionals in teacher training with some SEN remit – often very small and undefined – was, in 2003, probably no more than 40. Exact figures for populations of bureaucrats and teacher trainers are impossible because there are no clearly designated accountability – though there is a department for special needs at the Ministry of Education the majority of these bureaucrats have little or no specific training. Within SQU and the TTCs there are no dedicated SEN departments. Thus 26% of relevant bureaucrats, 42% of teachers at the three special schools and 45% of the relevant teacher trainers were interviewed.

Importantly, a data collection method was needed which would anchor the researcher's subjective responses to later data. There are four types of surveys, according to Ackroyd and Hughes (1983): factual, attitudinal, social psychological and explanatory. Questionnaires are a direct, impersonal method of data collection, and those discussed in chapter 5 contain aspects of all four types.

3.1.2 Qualitative analysis

If qualitative research is the opposite of the statistical method of quantitative research, not using "statistical procedures" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 17) then it depends primarily on the interpretive abilities of the researcher. Instead of measuring objectively it is analysing from within a unique set of experiences and perceptions of the researcher. It therefore combines a range of "interpretative practices" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 3) none of which dominate to create a single system. In this study, the qualitative range involved personal observation, input from personal experience and knowledge of Oman, and primarily interviews where linguistic/terminological aspects to coding and its analysis depended on the language skills and history of the researcher, as well as a certain element of linguistic and textual analysis borrowed from structuralism (Derrida, 1973) and semiotics/post-structuralism (Barthes, 1986; Eco, 1984). Context, as Barthes (1986) observes, is all, and this is reflected in the qualitative location of meaning in setting (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Whatever is being studied is given form "as much from their contexts as they do from themselves" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 189) perhaps in some situations more so (Eco, 1984). Qualitative research locates people in the places that shape and sustain them (Miles and Huberman, 1994) and looks at data sets not as abstractions or alien presences brought to earth by the researcher, but rather as solid personalities important *because of* rather than *despite* their mundane qualities. This is the prime benefit of the qualitative method in this research.

Qualitative research unlike quantitative research "makes little use of numbers and statistics, but instead relies on verbal data and subjective analysis" (Gall, Gall and Borg,

1999: 13). With the relative scarcity of public domain statistics from Oman the choice of more accessible sources is logical – interviews would also be up-to-date and less open to direct distortion. Unlike quantitative research, which bases interpretations strictly on empirical data, qualitative research relies on an element of interpretation. This is not only a method that fits better with the research history: it is more valuable in the context of a youthful provision, such as SEN in Oman. There is not very much hard data on SEN provision as yet, but there is naturally plenty of first hand data, and a qualitative approach offers a "scientific inquiry [which] should focus on the different social realities that individuals in a social situation construct as they participate in it" (Gall, Gall and Borg, 1999: 14). This subject and its setting presents a need to explore the way human beings in the various hierarchies in Oman construct ideological systems, and use these to justify or motivate their actions (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000: 159). This approach could help the observation and understanding of behaviour more closely, and construct some kind of predictive modelling for future developments (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Qualitative research in the Omani context is valuable in "understanding the meaning of human behaviour and socio-cultural context of social interaction" (Patton, 1987: 20) and therefore determining how and why those with SEN are seen and treated the way they are. A qualitative approach also allows a breadth of investigation, where it is possible to "stress the socially constructed nature of reality" and allows the researcher to develop further "the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 4). This is very much a piece of research where a researcher's commitment to and knowledge of the subject are keys to generative completion. The aim of this analysis is to move through the chaos and create a degree of order (Marshall and

Rossman, 1995: 111) that may generate hypotheses and offer wider contextually valuable insights.

3.1.3: Population and sample

The sample was not simply a source of information, but rather occupied a powerful role which put the researcher into the position of humble pupil (Spradley, 1979) – an opposite approach from the use of questionnaires (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). The first interview respondent, Noora (interviewed 2001) had indeed been one of the most influential teachers in the researcher's life. From this initial interview flowed an approach that did not aim to study but rather to learn.

Essentially a sample is not chosen, it is analytically constructed (Spradley, 1980) according to the parameters of research. The construction of the sample was based not only on the willingness and approachability of the sample but also on their relevance to the research – were they people with a direct input into or experience of SEN and/or teacher training? The interview sample was constructed according to certain parameters: there were constraints of time and energy. Travelling in Oman can be slow as well as tiring. The first (2001) interview sample therefore lives within the Muscat governorate, as do many of the second (2003) sample. Although the sample size itself is not large, the study was based on the knowledge that the interviews would be deeply analysed. Such a theoretical sample may seem constricted and constricting but the "focus in considerable detail on a small number of cases" (Pole and Lampard, 2002: 39) and the construction of a sample of key respondents made up for the limitations of size. The sample was

constructed using respondents who might have a substantive and generative input in SEN and teacher training, and who are representative of the field of education in Oman and the wider Omani population – as far as such representation is possible. Although most of the respondents are not Omani, this is not necessarily a contradiction. The similarities in terms of society and culture far outweigh the differences within the Arab world; also these are among the very few people involved with SEN and teacher training in Oman – although SEN is not designated as a remit of the department of psychology at SQU – who are also part of the Omani education discourse.

An important consideration was the access of researcher to the sample. Oman is not like the UK/EU; there are certain things which currently constrain researcher access. Sensitivity may be more dependent on context than topic (Renzetti and Lee, 1993: 6) and Omani sensitivities could be political, social, religious or simply pragmatic (see the discussion on ethical problems, 3.7). The political systems in the Middle East do not tend to encourage open expression – especially if that expression could be considered politically critical, or if that expression is felt to be part of a formal dialogue. The particular context increases sensitivity, and research "may threaten those studied through the levels of emotional stress they produce" (Renzetti and Lee, 1993: 6). It is possible that there are religious and cultural constraints on dialogue between a female interviewer and male interviewee, and some potential interviewees may feel the process – however well explained and contextualized – to be a stressful waste of time. Many teacher trainers and civil servants did not express adequate levels of approval of the process of

interviewing to facilitate an interesting and generative encounter. Ball (1990c) also notes the importance of location to the development of a generative atmosphere at interview.

The restrictions in the sample construction should not be underestimated: Oman is not yet a society where wide-ranging debate is acceptable or usual; the research interview is not commonly deployed in research. Access may be limited by a lack of experience of research and its methodologies, by shyness, and even by being a member of a resistant, unwilling hierarchy.

3.1.4: Sample profile

The goal of this research is to discover the way SENs are perceived and conceptualized within the context of teacher training. The sample represents a wide swathe of experience and expertise as well as background. Generalization is not being suggested here but an attempt at a wider sampling which may be useful for analysis (Corbin and Strauss, 1990: 191).

The sample size and profile was considered adequate to research needs because of the relatively small number of professionals in total involved with SEN / teacher training in Oman. There are very few people directly and solely involved in SEN / teacher training, so the department of psychology at SQU and the six TTCs furnished a sample of those with suitable experience. Also, following Borg and Gall (1979: 195), the sample size did not need to be larger because (1) there were few variables among professionals, and (2) the total population was relatively homogeneous.

The aim in constituting the sample was to gain a representative and insightful cross-section of relevant professionals. The preliminary (2001) interviews (chapter 4) concentrate on those with a direct input into, influence on or ability to make generative reflections on SEN and teacher training policy. The final phase (2003) interviews concentrated on those working as teacher trainers and educators. Within this first group, all had some decision or policy-making role, which might, in some way, affect those with SEN. In the second group all had experience of teacher training and some had specific knowledge of SENs and their provision. Both groups were considered key informants (Pole and Lampard, 2002), articulate people with significant experience of SEN and teacher training at many levels within the bureaucracy and at SQU and TTCs; their work or their work experience brought them into contact with SEN or SEN within the context of teacher training.

In the cases of Noora, Mariam and Khalifa (interviewed 2001), contact with the field of SEN has been significant; in the case of Badr (interviewed 2001), minimal. One was a university lecturer in psychology, an important interview since for many the psychology department remains the best location for the "treatment" of those with SEN – and civil servants at the Ministries of Education, Higher Education and Social Development. Four of these interviews underwent in-depth analysis (4.1; 4.5) and to maintain anonymity each respondent was given a coded name (see discussion of ethics in chapter 3.4). Although years of experience in the current job may be few (4 in the case of Noora) this should not mask a much longer experience of education (in Noora's case nearly 20).

All the 8 interviewees had experience of research work or academic studies outside Oman. There is a common cosmopolitan range of experiences, though this should not be taken to indicate a wider range of ideological positions – especially with regards to SEN – than others.

Table 3. 1: Characteristics of first all-Omani sample n = 8 (interviewed 2001)

Name	Gender	Occupation	Qualification	Years of experience (in current job)
Noora	Female	Policy-maker	MA, PhD	4
Khalifa	Male	Senior bureaucrat	BA	2
Mariam	Female	Senior bureaucrat	MA	2
Nawal	Female	Junior bureaucrat	BA	1
Badr	Male	Senior bureaucrat	MA, PhD	1
Hind	Female	Policy-maker	MA, PhD	4
Sara	Female	Associate professor	MA, PhD	15
Saajda	Female	Department head	MA	6

As table 3.1 indicates, educational backgrounds and jobs may vary but this variation is small and there are strong similarities in terms of background and qualifications. Most of the first 8 used English as a second language, allowing all but 3 of these initial interviews to be conducted in English, saving time in terms of translating and allowing a linguistic homogeneity which helped with coding. All 8 were aware of SEN issues and had significant knowledge of the Omani educational environment, all but 2 with specific relation to teacher training. These factors shaped the construction of the initial sample of SEN-related civil service professionals for chapter 4. Many were experts, policy-makers whose presence in the field probably affects the way teacher training and SEN provision develops. The second sample, used for the second analysis phase of chapters 6, 7 and 8, were more heterogeneous (see table 3.2).

All these were people with key roles in the wider range of teacher training within Oman.

Their links to the bureaucracy were as recipients of policy rather than instigators.

Table 3. 2: Characteristics of second sample n = 18 (interviewed 2003)

Name	Nationality	Gender	Specialization	Qualification	Years of experience (in current job)
Zaid	Non-Omani	Male	Senior educational psychologist	MA / PhD	5
Younnis	Non-Omani	Male	Social psychologist/ psychological management	MA/PhD	16
Riad	Non-Omani	Male	Dept of Psychology	MA/PhD	11
Hamed	Omani	Male	Assessment and testing	MA/PhD	19
Dunya	Omani	Female	Assistant teacher, SEN	MA	4
Hussain	Non-Omani	Male	Educational psychology	MA/PhD	5
Ishaaq	Non-Omani	Male	Development Psych	MA/PhD	8
Samir	Non-Omani	Male	Ed. Psych	MA/PhD	4
Saif	Omani	Male	Social Psych	MA/PhD	28
Salwa	Non-Omani	Female	Gen Psych	MA	8
Loai	Non-Omani	Male	Psych Health	MA/PhD	8
Adil	Non-Omani	Male	Gen Psych	MA/PhD	5
Yazeed	Non-Omani	Male	Social Psych	MA/PhD	7
Shaima	Omani	Female	General Psych	MA	7
Basma	Non-Omani	Female	General Psych	MA/PhD	6
Mubarak	Non-Omani	Male	General Psych	MA/PhD	3
Naader	Non-Omani	Male	Ed. Psych	MA/PhD	5
Maher	Non-Omani	Male	Ed.Psych	MA/PhD	8

(See also table 6.1)

These were respondents whose expertise and familiarity with policy and practice meant they are exceptionally well informed, had something to say about SEN as well as knowledge of the wider Omani educational and healthcare context and perceptiveness of linked social and political elements, and a sufficiently complex personal perspective that allowed the generation of meaningful commentary, and an ability to make informed judgements regarding future developments in Oman.

3.2: Research tools

3.2.1: Questionnaires

Anonymity allows greater latitude for respondents, an important consideration, especially in a society where personal expression may be constrained. There is also less likely to be the direct constraining influence of the researcher (Rubin and Rubin, 1995: 33).

Although no intimate or threatening questions were asked – in fact, a point was made to avoid any suggestion of intimacy or threat – nevertheless when respondents *were* asked about their views and recommendations there was always a chance that some might not want their responses broadcast. It should be remembered that the use of this research tool works in different ways to reveal different aspects of respondents' histories in different social contexts: what an English respondent might be happy to talk about in detail, might elicit evasion or disingenuousness elsewhere, and *vice versa*. Since questionnaires follow a format totally controlled by the researcher, with no chance that the respondent could somehow share in the directionality of the research process, the result is that the instrument is dominated by the researcher and their "perceptions" (Rubin and Rubin, 1995: 34).

The questionnaire was piloted on 28 mainstream and 9 SEN teachers currently working in Oman and who are known to the researcher. This pilot served two purposes: it helped suggest which questions would be most generative and which might encourage participation (Pole and Lampard, 2002: 102); it also helped create an initial map of teaching, SEN teaching and teacher training in Oman. The pilot allowed assessment of content validity. During the pilot, the only problem was loquaciousness – perhaps a common Arab trait, and linked to the need to be heard by a group of often-ignored individuals. The pilot was not gathered anonymously, allowing the maximum feedback on the questions used as well as any other aspects of education and daily experiences in the field. The pilot questionnaire worked surprisingly well as an instrument of initial investigation, but it was clear immediately that some questions should be avoided (open questions soliciting uncomfortable responses) and others should be shortened (to a closed yes/no response). The pilot also suggested that it might be better if the respondents themselves *suggested* problems and solutions rather than be prompted by the researcher (Pole and Lampard, 2002: 110)

3.2.2: The questionnaire design

The design of the questionnaire (see Appendix A) followed out of the pilot and the 8 interviews with education bureaucrats and lecturer that had taken place. "Good questionnaire design takes the form of a process rather than an event. It flows out of a period of theoretical reflection and concept operationalisation … " (Pole and Lampard, 2002: 102). The design of the questionnaires was based on educational and social research (Cohen, 2000; Patton, 1999, 1990, 1987; Holliday, 1994 and Burgess, 1985a and

1985b); and previous relevant studies (Huberman, 1989; Fessler and Christensen, 1992; Sikes, 1985; Fuller, 1969 and Day, 1999). Care was taken that the questionnaire topics were referenced against the overall objectives of the research, and that the wording of questions were not suggestive, and did not "lead" respondents. The questionnaire was in Arabic, in order that there were few semantic ambiguities, and that all respondents found understanding and answering easy. It should be remembered, however, that while Arabic is a lingua franca in its classical form, there are many colloquial differences. One important consideration is that, as with the interviews in the analysis chapters (chapters 6, 7 and 8) semantic problems are avoided by unobtrusive researcher sensitivity to meaning. When designing the questions, the intention was to translate responses and absorb them into a statistical data programme. The Arabic questions are direct and precise, made in classical Arabic to avoid misapprehension of what might be colloquial terms, and to allow precise translation. The value of being easily able to refer *back* to responses later was recognized, as was the view that simplicity, at this stage, would be particularly valuable.

At first it was intended to use a multiple-choice section but, since the aim was to target as many respondents as possible, and since the answers required were to provide the context for the main part of the thesis, this would have been a distraction. It was clear that respondents' time was at a premium – a universal characteristic of teachers – and that if too much was asked responses would diminish.

The questionnaires were taken to the teaching staff at the three special schools in the Muscat area (see figure 1.1 and chapter 5.2). These elicited basic information such as

gender, nationality, qualifications and length of employment in Oman. There was also room on each questionnaire sheet for more detailed open responses regarding problems and recommendations. The construction of the questionnaire was such as to allow a maximum response on a range of key issues without either putting teachers off with having to engage in a major writing project or suggesting that they make uncomfortable semi-political criticisms – problems which had been suggested by the pilot.

The questionnaire was constructed in two parts: the first part aims at gathering basic background information about the respondents: countries of origin, length of teaching experience, sex, qualifications and what in-service training they may have done; the second part examined the respondents' views about the usefulness of in-service training, general pedagogic problems faced, and invited their suggested solutions to those problems. Respondents were given a chance to add their own comments.

The questionnaires were handed to each teacher personally by the researcher, who expressed a willingness to go over the questions and answer any queries. This was considered the best way to overcome any feelings of diffidence, and, by introducing the idea at a personal level, overcome the sense of strangeness created by a research instrument with which many could be unfamiliar. Unlike the EU or US, market or opinion research is not carried out in Oman, or indeed in the wider Arab world in a way that would render questionnaires familiar even to many professionals. There are some questionnaires used internally to the education bureaucracy, but these allow only a limited response on designated topics (see chapter 8.2) and may not develop a deeper

familiarity with the questionnaire as research tool.

After all the questionnaires were collected by hand, analysis followed. Initially, the responses were entered as data into an Excel spreadsheet, which then could generate graphics and descriptive statistics.

There are advantages and disadvantages to using questionnaires (Ball, 1990c; Wellington, 2003). While questionnaires may help to create useful distance between researcher and data, helping increase a sense of objectivity, this same distance also means the researcher is unable to adjust the data gathering as it is going on. Faults with questions, question order or misunderstanding of questions among a data set cannot be obviated by researcher intervention as can be done in interviews (May, 1993: 86). There were a number of occasions, reading the data achieved, that it might have seemed useful to return to respondents and get substantial embellishments on intriguing single sentence responses; but follow up, due to anonymity, was not possible.

Ease of administration in terms of economies of cost, time and labour, were important since the researcher was not herself based in Oman. There was also the ease with which illuminating statistics may be generated, and generated with a sense of accuracy: out of a total number of 158 teachers at the special schools, 72 completed and returned the questionnaires. The chance to reach a large sample is an important aspect of the use of such an instrument. A method that could be prepared without too much prior contact, and then analyzed and used without further contact, was of particular practical value. The

three schools were geographically separated, and questionnaires were a logical way to reach respondents. Weaknesses included respondents not answering certain questions, and some targeted teachers not responding at all, both events possibly creating distortions in the data. In the first case the questions unanswered were not always "difficult" – one respondent did not give their gender. In the case of those 86 who did not respond at all, it is difficult to predict how the replies unsupplied differed from those who did reply (Pole and Lampard, 2002: 113). The reticence represented by these 86 suggested that there might be some problems eliciting responses at the stage of interviews.

Despite this response size, the results still have validity because, at 72 SEN teachers, the response was nearly 50% of the total number of SEN teachers in Oman, large enough for the extrapolation of serious and generative data.

3.2.3: Interviews

There were two phases of interviews, divided by the quantitative examination of the questionnaire data from and observations of the three special schools (chapter 5). The first phase of 8 concentrated on bureaucrats, the second phase of 18 moved on to include teacher trainers and teaching staff at SQU and TTCs. The process of interviewing should not be and was not predictable, but instead provided an insightful journey into the data set's personalities (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). Interviewing should as far as possible deliver a picture of the data set unmediated by the interpersonal events of the interview, the relative relationships due to factors such as class or sex (Lofland and Lofland, 1995) and the mechanics of recording, transcribing and translating – all of which may be barriers to

the production of data. An interview should ideally therefore be "a window on a time and a social world that is experienced one person at a time, and one incident at a time" (Rubin and Rubin, 1995: 11).

While it is useful to regard research interviews as "encounters between a researcher and a respondent in which the latter is asked a series of questions relevant to the subject of the research", encounters where "the respondent's answers constitute the raw data analysed at a later point in time by the researcher" (Ackroyd and Hughes, 1983: 91) no interactive experience is ever *just* an encounter. Interviewing is at the heart of qualitative data gathering and is therefore both an art and a science, requiring "skill, sensitivity, concentration, interpersonal understanding, insights, mental activity, and discipline" (Patton, 1987: 44). In the Omani context where politeness and correct form are considerably more important than in many Western states these skills and qualities may have been particularly vital to the research process, and the relationship developed during an interview will affect the quality of data collected (Ball, 1990a). Potential social and sexual barriers (Lofland and Lofland, 1995) had always to be kept in mind; since many in the data set were older, the correctness due from youth to experience had to be observed without allowing this to become a barrier. One enormous advantage may well have been that the interviewer was known to many respondents and therefore barriers may have been fewer or at least lower.

In contrast to the quantitative methodology which is bounded by the statistical realities of location and period, qualitative analysis seeks out the broader picture, filled with the

topography of real people obtained by interviewing. The aim of the interviews and their analysis is understanding but not losing track of the people who afford that understanding: "interviewing research is an interest in other individuals' stories because of what they are worth" (Seidman, 1998: 3). What the process of interviewing – and the concomitant coding and analysis – aimed to do was increase understanding (Spradley, 1979) of a heterogeneous group consisting of a lecturer, teacher trainers and bureaucrats often struggling with concepts of SEN.

Although some of those interviewed will have been used to such experiences, most found the interview a totally novel experience (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). Recognizing this, the respondents were approached in the least formal manner possible – without being too conversational or proceeding to a "non-directive" interview style – and with sensitivity (Seidman, 1991).

It was considered useful to allow all interviewees enough freedom to develop their arguments without feeling constrained either by the interviewer, her position (within the special occasion of the interview, or in terms of ranking according to relative social class, gender and age), or by the dynamics of a formal interview. As the first fifteen minutes of Noora's (2001) interview show, there was little constraint: questions and responses ran more like a conversation between intimate friends. Maybe this was due to the comfortable relationship already mentioned; maybe, also, it was encouraged by the conduct of the interview on the phone (it may be that lack of non-verbal communication

allows some interviewees to be more forthcoming). Badr's (2001) interview was much more constrained – and the researcher was not prepared adequately for this difference.

The researcher as "instrument" of research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) can never expect the experience to be either simple or straightforward, for a variety of reasons. Increased informality might not have been generative; males might have taken it as a cue to control the interaction; females might have suspected ulterior motivations. An egalitarian approach does not easily accord with more general discursive practice in Oman (see chapter 1). The advantages and disadvantages generated by the closeness between researcher and data set may be exaggerated in the Omani context, and by the unusual nature of interviewing for those Omanis interviewed. In the first 8 interviews it was found that too much informality could lead – in certain difficult circumstances – to power shifts and awkwardness, even to a collapse in communication at points. The dynamic nature of interviews should never be either underestimated or overlooked (Rubin and Rubin, 1995).

Whatever the factors, the researcher needed to be particularly aware of how the technicalities of interviewing work with or against the socio-political characteristics of the data set (Ball, 1990c). The researcher may also be more tempted to impress their own discursive viewpoint on the process (Derrida, 1973; Hertz, 1997) either because of familiarity with the *milieu*, or because of a sense of being "better informed" than some in the data set. This is the negative side of reflexivity. There may be a very specific and unique dynamic at work in Oman, where social discourse through and within the media –

or other public and semi-public means – is limited or proscribed. In terms of the interviews, this means a dynamic existed which sometimes manifested itself in the researcher's reliance on inferred meaning and implicit concepts rather than explicit expression.

Interviewing is one of the preferred techniques for data collection in qualitative research. An interview is "a conversation, usually between two people. But it is a conversation where one person – the interviewer – is seeking responses for a particular purpose from the other person: the interviewee. This may or may not be for the particular benefit of the person being interviewed" (Gillham, 2000: 1). The question of benefit is returned to in the section on ethics (see chapter 3.4) but in "seeking responses" the researcher is not just constructing interpretations (Hertz, 1997) but is deconstructing and then reconstructing (Eco, 1984) the worlds of the data set. Seeking responses cannot therefore be anything like bird-watching; it is dynamic and intrusive, cyclic and interactive (Powney and Watts, 1987), and the danger must be that the deconstructing and reconstructing processes involved turn the researcher as instrument (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) into researcher as creative artist.

Interviews can range from semi-structured (typically Badr (interviewed 2001) in chapter 4), through less structured (Noora (interviewed 2001) in chapter 4, and the majority of the interviews in chapters 6, 7 and 8) to unstructured interviews (the majority of the phase one interviews in chapter 4). Interviews explored as many interviewing possibilities as time and other constraints, such as cost and convenience, permitted (Gillham, 2000;

Fielding, 1993). These constraints are recognized in the interviews of the main data set (Newell, 1993).

Greater motivation of both interviewed and interviewer was likely in a semi-structured interview (Cohen, 1977: 269) than by using the unfamiliar form of a questionnaire. Since there is already a sense among civil servants that their ideas are unsought and unregarded, face to face interviews which avoided obvious structuring seemed to obviate this by creating a sense of greater and more visible researcher receptivity. Although with workers in the field useful responses to general questions *were* collated in the questionnaire (chapter 5) more detail would not have been available had questionnaires been used exclusively.

Motivation may have much to do with the dynamics of a small community: Oman is a country of less than three million (see chapter 1.1) and the capital governorate, where this research was mostly conducted, is smaller still. Face to face interviews allowed interviewees to gauge the aims and sincerity of the researcher, building on what they already knew. Personal contact also acts as a brake on that propensity of the researcher to reconstruct too radically. It was easy for the researcher to put people at ease who might usually have been more defensive, and it was also useful for the researcher at the coding, analysis and writing up stages to be able to remember the individuals who are the data set.

The type of interview varied between respondents and even, occasionally, within interviews (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Both the first and second phase of interviews

observed Patton's "standardized open-ended interview" structure (Patton, 1986: 206) which does not seek easy closed answers to questions – yes or no type responses – but rather allows the interview an elasticity and responsiveness. Importantly, the first phase of 8 interviews determined what could usefully be sought in the second phase of 18, leaving out those questions and follow-ups that would be likely to elicit predictable responses, and looking to develop those questions which had been initially most intriguing (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 9). In terms of time constraints before and after, and for comparison and initial coding, the key set of questions initially established was maintained in a similar format and order. The advantages were that apart from time and comparison already mentioned, it was clear that, in most cases, all that was needed to be asked *was* asked, and the results could then readily be open-coded and later analyzed. In return, any questions asked by interviewees could readily be answered, and the researcher was both in control yet not so dominant as to impose her own discursive reality. The interview importantly was not constrained by unfamiliar levels of formality. It was not found that the researcher's natural approach was in any way compromised; all relevant areas were covered without lapses or hiatuses. One very important reason for allowing flexibility was the researcher's initial lack of information of the details of SEN policy-making and the way this affected teacher training in the Omani context.

3.2.4: Language and transcription

A strong practical reason for the choice of the first phase of interviews (table 3.1) was that the majority could be interviewed in English. The three interviewed in Arabic had significant contributions to make, gains from which offset the lengthy process of

translation. All of the second phase (table 3.2) were interviewed in Arabic, and the processes of preparatory translation of English SEN words and ideas into Arabic, use of these unusual terms in the already unusual context of the interview, translation back into English of the complex linguistic negotiation that had occurred, and the contextualization, coding and analysis of the translated terms was a significantly lengthier and more arduous process.

Each of the first phase of 8 interviewees needed to be able to respond on linguistically complex issues. Since the majority of the first phase interviews were in English, this helped a comparison of terminological and ideological issues without dealing with the added complexity of continual comparative linguistic issues, and the difficulties of translation; again this helped prepare the analytic-conceptual framework to be used in the second phase of interviews and the work that would follow. In those three instances where Arabic *was* used, particular attention was paid to the precision of the translation, frequently checking the translation with a specialist comparative linguist at SQU. Most words were easily translated in context.

In the second phase interviewing in Arabic there were immediately apparent problems of translation due to the fact that most SEN and education research relies on – and to a great extent is defined by – a terminology which is westernized.

The aim of the researcher, during the second phase interviews, was to avoid the use wherever possible of academic or, indeed, SEN-specific language (Cohen, 1977: 280).

This presented certain problems. Although classical Arabic is used almost universally among the Arab nations, there are many colloquial variations. This means that ideas may be represented by similar or slightly different or very different sets of words: an exaggerated version of the difference between the early modern English of the King James Bible and the huge variety of modern variations, from Caribbean to Australian English. There were also problems associated with the apparently specific – but actually currently fluid – concepts of SEN within the wider discourse of disability. There were attempts to select a certain linguistic register (Heritage, 2004: 235) which the interviewee would consider appropriate to the interview. This often included terminology which they had not been used to in daily life. This special vocabulary is not well articulated in Arabic, which faces the same problems as English in terms of appropriateness and descriptive adequacy.

All this had to be in the back of the researcher's mind, while simultaneously keeping both the interview and, later, translated languages as clear and ordinary as possible in order to encourage rich responses and then allow generative analysis. The problem is touched on by Silverman (2004: 355) when he discusses the slippery nature of words that categorize, and is clearly pointed out by Strauss and Corbin who say "the difficulties of accurate, let alone nuanced, translation are legion" (1998: 285). The researcher tried hard to capture the original intentions both accurately and in a nuanced way, referring back constantly to the original recordings and notes taken simultaneously.

Transcription is a form of translation that inevitably loses many sociolinguistic nuances as well as the culture-specific complexities of the original Arabic – already significantly interspersed with specialist terms in English – which has been translated into English. Semantic shifts are inevitable (Serres, 1995), and the result needed constantly to be compared to the researcher's memories of the original interviews.

The approach to interview transcription kept in mind open coding – "the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" (Strauss, 1990: 61) – the technique used to analyse the interviews. Accordingly, a grounded theory approach, where theory derives from data, (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Cohen and Manion, 2001), was the most appropriate and generative way to achieve a "constant comparative method of analysis" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), a way to identify and examine what is really going on in the minds of respondents.

Following each interview, in both the initial and second phases, the recording made was reviewed on the same day as the interview itself, then the interviews were transcribed as accurately as possible. On occasion this was difficult due to levels of "noise" – technological, effectiveness and semantic problems (Fiske, 1982). The problem of noise was extensive, in the senses of problems understanding the interviewee, or even of hearing the interviewee, interruptions by telephone or the whirr of an air conditioner. The case of Noora (interviewed 2001), where the entire interview was conducted over the phone – this was the only telephone interview – might have been expected to cause complications because of a lack of any non-verbal communication; yet the interview and its transcription were straightforward. With Badr (interviewed 2001) the quietness of his

voice and the whirr of the air conditioner made transcription much harder. A directional microphone and digital recording technology might have made the job of transcription quicker and easier – but these advantages might equally reduce the depth of researcher concentration and thus the quality of coding. After transcription as many of the blanks as possible were filled by going carefully over the recordings again (Rubin and Rubin, 1995: 151). There remained a few places where neither the recording, repeated listening nor memory could help, and these were left blank.

Whenever Arabic terms were used specifically by an interviewee it was best to keep these in the original, especially since these expressed specialist ideas. In some areas Arabic terms did not correspond *exactly* to English, and therefore the problem was pointed up by keeping the Arabic. At rare times, the phrases illustrate some very specific ideological differences between the Arabic speaker and their Western counterpart, or when, in an interview conducted in Arabic a word or phrase presented specific uniqueness. For example /demj/, which may be translated as either *integration* or *inclusion*, but which can be best translated as *blending* or even in common use *soldering* (see chapter 2.3).

In order to aid comparison, as well as for reference during coding, a grid was constructed – from which tables 3.1, 3.2 and 6.1 derive – giving a clear idea of the qualifications, experience, perceptions and knowledge of each of the interviewees. Finally, clear summaries were constructed from each of the interviews for reference purposes.

The transcription, possible translation, construction of grids and final summaries, helped in identifying the 28 codes, and then 5 themes chosen for Chapter 4 and the synthesized variants used in chapter 6, 7 and 8 (see tables 3.3 and 3.4). This process will now be explained.

3.3: Data coding and analysis

The crucial element of awareness at the stage of interviews – an awareness Ball (1990c) calls "reflexivity" – and the movement from interviewing to coding and analysis demands greater sensitivity. This level of sorting the useful and pertinent from the relatively unimportant, while remembering that even unimportant aspects may have important things to say through frequency or omission, is part of that same process that developed the initial phase of interviewing into the second phase. What Strauss and Corbin (1990) describe as "theoretical sensitivity" is essentially analytical and critical sensitivity, that sensitivity "that allows one to develop a theory that is grounded, conceptually dense, and well integrated" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 42) generative of insights and hypotheses that do not obscure or do violence to the data set themselves. Ideally, "the process of coding succeeds in moving attention beyond the particular concerns of individual students and towards more general issues" (Pole and Lampard, 2002: 204) thus sensitizing the researcher.

Coding involves imposing order on more or less chaotic material; a method that helps identify data, label it and helps in later retrieval (Lofland and Lofland, 1995: 187). Coding gives the researcher the chance of objectivity, of a fresh perspective, and of new

insights (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996: 45). It may not be clear what coding involves as a process: is it an analysis of entire sentences or individual units of meaning – if such might be identified? Should the researcher/coder endeavour to read meaning into or out of the interview? How did the use of Arabic affect coding? For example, a unit of meaning or word may – in fact, will – have a very different set of associations and therefore meanings in Arabic and English. What of apparent contradictions? Interviews are, after all, not structured dissertations.

The content of the first interview – with Noora (2001) – generated an initial series of codes which ran from A to P, with the additions of B1 and C1 (see Tables 3.3 a, b and c). These 18 categories were changed slightly following the transcription and analysis of the next 4 interviews, but these changes were addenda rather than structural alterations.

Because the codes are generated by the initial exploratory analysis and the coding of Noora's interview, the order is that of interview question sequence and, perhaps more importantly, her responses to the questions. This stage is a search for defining and organizing concepts, and gives an outline of issues related to teacher training and SEN in Oman – an outline that, if not exhaustive, is a useful skeleton. The first set of codes may be broken down into background information, personal information and perceptions, policy and provision.

Although Noora's interview was planned thoroughly, the relationship between interviewee and interviewer dictated a much easier interaction than may be usual: she was very forthcoming about her background and the way this had affected her current

role and attitudes to SEN. Negatively, this may have *encouraged* coding in anticipation, and because of this already-established sympathy, meaning may have been generated more subjectively than elsewhere. This warned of a greater need with some interviewees towards conscious even anticipatory interviewer objectivity – including ways to establish and maintain personal distance during an interview. Sometimes this may seem rude in the Omani tradition – especially between two women of the same social class and age.

In the case of Sara (interviewed 2001), this effort made the interviewer increasingly nervous, and may have prompted too many interviewer interruptions. Conversely with Badr (interviewed 2001), the same effort worked in the opposite direction, encouraging the interviewer to appear too uninvolved – this can be particularly damaging since then the interviewee ceases to believe that the time spent on the interview is worthwhile.

Disconnection is never an option in this type of interview – the options are between different sensitivities to a range of connections, tweaked according to the type of interviewee, their mood, the situation and, even, the mood of the interviewer. In qualitative work, it may be problematic to balance involvement with disconnection. These experiences had considerable impact on the style of interviewing for the second phase of interviews.

Table 3.3 a: Codes A – F (descriptive background information)

A	Status of interviewer / interviewee
B	Change over recent historical period and current educational developments
B1	The current Omani situation: professional and social environment
C	SEN and specific needs of Oman
C1	Attitudes to disability/SEN in Oman

D	Link between literacy and SEN (or not)
E	Disability (excluding definitions)
F	Link between research and general education policy

Table 3.3 b: Table 3.3b: Codes G – J (concepts – personal information and perceptions)

G	Experience and achievement of interviewee
H	Commitment (of interviewee to specific areas of development)
I	Hierarchy (how bureaucracy felt to be involved in provision of SEN)
J	Perceptions (interviewee's / others') and opinions of interviewee

Table 3.3 c: Codes K – P (description of SEN policy and provision)

K	SEN policy formation
L	Aims (general)
M	Definition of specific terms across languages – not interviewee-specific
N	Teacher training and SEN
O	Teacher training courses, SEN and Oman
P	Integration

These categories were not difficult to identify: identifying issues followed organically from the analysis of the interview (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Noora's interview suggested a number of key areas; in fact the dominant five themes (see table 3.5) into which were distilled all later codes were contained in her responses. Objectivity and adequacy of coding of the initial interview was checked following the next three interviews: the original codes - with only one or two changes – were found to follow coding observations; developments later did not substantially affect what had originally been done.

One problem illustrated by Noora's (2001) interview was the initial keenness to code or over-code - the first responses were coded "A" for status. This keenness was muted on a

second reading of the coding, and there was a temptation to recode (Rubin and Rubin, 1995: 239), remove some of these first codes, and even under-code to compensate. Concern about subjectivity of response may lead to a pendulum effect, where coding may seem at first relevant and then less relevant (Rubin and Rubin, 1995: 240). On consideration, initial coding was almost always retained in revision. Perhaps some of this problem might be laid at the door of research itself; the more that is known about a subject, the more may be read into responses which, before, would have been considered innocent, the more the researcher may be tempted to code everything (Silverman, 1995: 37). For example, when Noora says, "I realised the need for specialising in the field of education in Oman" (Noora, interviewed 2001) this was coded "H" for commitment – though the essence of that part of her statement which could be linked to the idea of "commitment" might in other circumstances have been considered too flimsy to code.

Clearly some areas were going to be of more interest – more generative in terms of SEN and teacher training – than others, and the interviewees would know this. For example, the description of the development of policy formation in Oman – coded "K" – and the perceived relationship between the bureaucracy and provision – coded "I". The difference between descriptive and conceptual coding was sometimes a matter of a slight change of emphasis, and did not necessarily obey syntactic boundaries. Knowledge of researcher interest might prompt the interviewee in some cases, but, as is clear from the later interviews, not always: Badr (interviewed 2001) seemed to want to evade rather than answer questions. It should be admitted that this problem could prove difficult in some interviews with Omanis; there is a different culture of giving or withholding opinion in

Oman – especially within the unusual context of the academic questionnaire or interview – when compared with the UK.

The method of coding was simplified by a process of highlighting both the descriptive and the more conceptual areas of the transcribed texts, and then narrowing down important sections; this helped identify which words and phrases needed consideration, especially when going back over an interview to check coding – a method of particular use in the later interviews where coding became an important guide to social and organizational discourses (Pole and Lampard, 2002: 194). Seemingly mundane or repeated sections were not ignored but gave by their frequencies an idea of how important an interviewee might actually feel these to be. The danger here is that if care is not taken useful or relevant sections of an interview might be discarded too easily, and then these would be difficult to "recover" later (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

At the beginning, analysis was more descriptive, while, as the analysis went on, coding became more conceptual and analytical. There may have been an element of slipping from description to analysis as the researcher became more aware of conceptual complexities. Some codes were easier to spot than others: usually those referring to concrete events or structures; for example "A" – *the status of interviewee*; "B" – *change over recent historical period and current educational developments*. Those codes referring to more abstract concepts, for example "H" – *commitment of interviewee to specific areas of development* – were initially more difficult to identify. This does not mean these codes were not useful, simply that there was a difference in ease of

application, and that sometimes the difference was due to the position of the researcher in the process of analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 46); as concepts emerged and others were seen to fit the developing hypotheses less well.

Once the second interview was coded there was a need to extend and adapt the codes. This was not because the second interview contained radically different information, or new areas of interest, simply that the process of coding had become more sophisticated.

Table 3.4: Codes Q – Z (blue = more purely descriptive, red = more purely conceptual)

Q	Inclusion
R	Exclusion
S	Teacher reactions
T	**Special schools**
U	Assessment of students with SENs
V	**Personal experience of SEN (and disability)**
W	**Positive reaction to SEN provision**
X	**Negative reaction to SEN provision**
Y	Curricular needs and design
Z	Vocational training

Each code emerged for specific reasons. "A" *the status of interviewer / interviewee* is important because of the relationship created by relative status, and then because of the importance in terms of policy of the interviewee within their policy-implementing or policy-making structures. Should this coding keep recurring, it might give an insight into the interviewee's sense of identity in terms of their work. "V" *personal experience of SEN* (*and disability)* was added later since that expanded the interviewee's link with the field of disability.

Two further codes were added as the process of coding continued: these were linked to existing codes but were felt to occupy a slightly different conceptual space. "B" *the change over recent historical period and current educational developments* was clearly central to the research topic: here was information which would put any findings into social and cultural context. "B1" was added to amplify this contextualization: *the current Omani situation, professional and social environment* is directly relevant to any recommendations made later. "C" – *SEN and specific needs of Oman* continued this contextualization by coding the social and cultural environment for SEN within the country, and then adding, as "C1", *attitudes to disability/SEN in Oman*. This latter was important when interviewing Badr (2001) and reviewing Noora's (2001) interview. "D" *link between literacy and SEN (or not)* seems to have had limited use, but was encouraged by references in the literature (Hegarty, 1993). Also, Omani government statistics (Omani Ministry of Education, 2005) continue to show relatively high levels of illiteracy at around 40%, which must be a factor in considering SEN in the Omani context. "E" *disability (excluding definitions)* seems relevant in terms of contextualization of special needs – other attitudes towards different abilities and difference in general apparent in Omani society. Although this coding was not used much in the first interviews, awareness of such considerations guided the establishment of future coding. Within this set falls "M" *definition of specific terms across languages – not interviewee-specific* which allows an appreciation of the use of a wide range of specialist terminology in English and Arabic.

It was valuable to code those areas directly linked to the thesis topic – while remembering not to allow the topic retrospectively to code the interviews (Strauss and

Corbin, 1998: 146). "N" *teacher training and SEN* and "O" *teacher training courses, SEN and Oman* and, latterly, "Z" *vocational training* all have such relevance. All codes seemed to extend logically from the interviews, and may have been prompted also partly by the literature. Such knowledge must be a significant spur to increasing the complexity of coding. The final stage was to arrange these codes into important fields or sets – matrixes (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 182) according to meaning and density of meaning. Again the choices seemed logical.

The process of coding and analysis that developed from the initial experience described here and in chapter 4 into the deeper and more complex analysis of chapters 6, 7 and 8 is based in the development of grounded theory (Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1998) and went through a number of stages:

(1) transcription (sometimes translation and re-transcription);
(2) first coding, using eight categories based on the earlier 28 codes, of the first tranche of interviews with policy makers;
(3) second coding, cutting the coding categories down from 8 to 5;
(4) simultaneously with (2) and (3) the construction of a grid of responses (Appendix B), with some analytic commentary.

The grid constructed to facilitate quick reference to the 2003 data set (Appendix B) made the responses in the interviews more accessible, acting as an *aide memoir*, so the kind of material gathered could be seen and categorized more effectively and deeply. The grid allowed a conceptual accessibility, and it is from the grid that the overall patterns of thought across the interviews could be mapped out and new coding suggested.

The first time the grid was used it was a much simpler, much more direct affair: the questions used were simply taken out for the y-axis and the responses to those questions filled the x-axis, allocated according to how closely these answers fitted with the concerns of the thesis topic. No specific responses of the researcher's were added, nor attempt made to alter the codes established in the period leading up to the analysis: the codes were taken to be unassailable for the purposes of the grid and later for the analysis of the interviews.

The coding of the second interview series bore in mind the need to develop and interpret the thesis topic in depth: concepts and policy were at the forefront of the analysis. The codes themselves were no longer seen as rigidly discrete (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The x-axis boxes were filled not just with direct quotes, but, according to the y-axis codes, also included basic analytic points which could then feed in to the analyses of chapters 6, 7 and 8. Sometimes the codes themselves became porous, and allowed categorization and analysis of those areas of the interviews which either overlapped different coding categories, or escaped those categories altogether. This may not have been a problem in the three analysis chapters, since the identification of individual elements should usefully be used in recombination to generate a re-conceptualizing of the field.

Recognizing some of the earlier codes may have been created more in hope than with an eye to the actual nature of the interviews; those categorizations that would not feed directly into the analysis were pruned out. More information about either empowerment

or, more specifically, gender, might have been an interesting addition, but neither dominated the material (Pole and Lampard, 2002: 204). Gender did occur as a topic, but only in two interviews to any meaningful extent, and empowerment is an overtly Western concept which, while it may have its Omani counterparts, equally may be of little analytic value in this thesis. The aim was not to transplant overtly Western discourses and their boundaries into a very different situation.

The core of five themes recognizes the need to link concepts and the process and consideration of policy (chapter 7). The aim is to begin to prepare the clear identification of those areas where concepts and policy are least congruent.

Table 3.5: Themes identified by the coding of the 2001 interviews

THEMES CODED	THEMES DESCRIBED
A	Perception and categorization; the appearance of SEN; categories used.
B	Terminology – its use in Arabic – and specialist language.
C	Attitude, paradigm of practice / theory; SEN ideology and identity; gender and empowerment.
D	Change and the future – social (Omani and comparative UK) analyses.
E	Strategies and policy / current issues / practical issues of practice.

What may have been lost in terms of subtle shades during this pruning was gained by the clarity of more specific areas. The only code left untouched from the initial coding was *terminology and language*, an area which can, in certain interviews, indicate where concepts and policy are widest apart, and where disjunction is most apparent: an interviewee may articulate their support for SEN provision, while, simultaneously use terms such as "deviant" or "abnormal" for those students they say they wish to help.

There are areas where the concepts represented by the codes seem to overlap. For example, the perception of SEN (A), is closely allied to the way the future is considered (D); and overall change and the future (D) is close to strategies and policy (E). An attempt was made not to *force* any parts of the interviews into thematic categories, and, where necessary allowed the themes to overlap, while trying to use that overlap to generate interesting nuances of thought. "[T]he procedures of making comparisons, asking questions, and sampling based on evolving theoretical concepts" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 46) is a generative process in terms of extending and refining thematic concepts.

The coding thus developed in a natural rather than artificial manner, ending with the identification of central themes. Chapter 6 flows from this organic development and categorization. Language as a theme which represents in some measure the ideological position of the respondent is the key to qualitative analysis (Wellington, 2003: 148): since two streams of parallel concepts expressed in different languages are being dealt with simultaneously it is necessary to show that, quite frequently, language can be as much of a barrier as a communicator.

3.4: Research ethics

The relationship of researcher to those people who form the data set is never straightforward and should never be taken for granted. The people that form the data set are not objects designed for research, but their humanity allows the researcher the

privilege of investigation. Investigation must be sensitive to those very human factors that affect the progress of data gathering, including "differences and similarities" of social class, gender and race that "enter into the consciousness of individuals" (Edwards, 1991: 187). These differences and similarities may be compounded in the Omani context by specific social attitudes to gender, religion and age. The way in which the researched locate the researcher in terms of the variables (Burgess, 1989) may be crucial to the progress of the research, but the researcher should be wary of the desensitizing process of scientific methodology – however qualitative it may be. It would be wrong to pretend that research can ever be neutral in any setting; it is the responsibility of the researcher to work appropriately through the web of differences and similarities without compromising the work or its purpose, and without compromising those who form the core material.

It would be disingenuous not to admit that there were automatically issues linked to confidentiality in the responses. No job is secure outside political and social pressures and therefore "respondents should not be identifiable in print [nor] … suffer harm or embarrassment as a consequence of research" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998: 175). Anonymity, in the context of research which may have some policy repercussions, is not a luxury – informants have "a right to remain anonymous" (Spradley, 1979: 38). Cooperation could not be taken for granted, and if some of the second phase data set seemed to offer superficial responses this may have been because of worries about anonymity (Kimmel, 1988). Cooperation may have been tacitly withdrawn by some respondents because of certain conditions obtaining at the interviews.

(1) The identity and status of the interviewer;

(2) The use of a recording machine – which may have been perceived by some as a threat;

(3) The general social / political / working environment which discourages frankness;

(4) Lack of credibility in the researcher's assurances of confidentiality. (Cohen et al, 2000: 62)

It is possible that in a small, hierarchic society, the status of the interviewer could automatically compromise the anonymity of the data gathering process. A question may therefore be raised as to the usefulness of the data collected. However, since the researcher was aware of these problems and the possibilities of distortion they engendered, it is also possible that these conditions would not necessarily invalidate the interview process.

(1) It is not likely that the researcher's identity was a problem in more than a very few cases; in those cases where it caused undue deference the data may not necessarily have been affected.

(2) The tape recorder was not intrusive: some interviewees said they *had* forgotten the presence of the recorder, others developed into the interview losing initial nervousness and relaxing. In the single case where the interviewee requested not to be recorded, the machine was immediately dispensed with.

(3) The general social / political / working environment in Oman is a very fluid thing, and although Oman is a small country, it would be unwise to make any general statements regarding the way honesty or openness could be undermined. Although this may be the case with some interviewees, too many have cosmopolitan experiences to be easily intimidated by their environment.

(4) As far as the researcher could judge, assurances of confidentiality were, in general, believed. The experience of another Omani researcher (Al-Belushi, 2003) supported this supposition.

However, as Spradley suggests (1979: 38) confidentiality does not just mean altering names but rather extends to a strict sense of the professionalism of the research process. It is clear from this that the way the researcher positions themselves in the research process can influence the extent and the nature of the data achieved (Berg and Smith, 1988; Borg and Gall, 1996). The position of both researcher and interviewee dictates a need to develop sensitivity to the linguistic and socio-linguistic codes of respondents.

Within the context of the Omani education system, the hierarchical nature of which means that people may not be fully informed about the processes of policy, where being informed is not necessarily a right, the researcher may not seem to need Spradley's (1979) advice to keep respondents up to speed with the aims and progress of research. This however would run contrary to the aims of the research, which is to suggest a greater openness as a pedagogic and policy quality; an openness which helps provision by spreading awareness and understanding. Informing those involved – at the three

special schools for questionnaires or observation, and the two phases of interviews – was therefore considered important. Research such at this may criticise lack of communication. If it then fails to communicate during its own data gathering and analysis it commits an ethical *faux pas* which is tantamount to hypocrisy. All contact was therefore introduced by introductory letters, face to face explanations, and *post-facto* feedback regarding the progress of research. Interestingly, those involved were more interested in this contact than in guaranteed anonymity. Spradley's assertion (1979: 38) that there may be a need for respondents to feel they too have achieved something through taking part in the data gathering is important: if many in education feel they are exploited (Al-Belushi, 2003) then researchers should ensure they communicate a sense of altruism. The ethical bottom line was that those people and institutions asked to take part felt they gained from that involvement.

On a note of caution, qualitative methods may be open to accusations of subjectivity; the researcher themselves may be open to accusations of bias (Patton, 1987; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). The fact that the researcher never lost sight of such possibilities may have turned a methodological handicap into an advantage.

> [T]hese [researcher bias and subjectivity] are resources and, if the researcher is sufficiently reflexive about her project, she can evoke these as resources to guide data gathering or creating and for understanding her own interpretations and behaviour in the research. (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998: 314)

In other words, awareness of possible bias sharpens critical instincts. Analysis develops beyond a linear process and becomes a deepening circular experience, with knowledge of

personal inadequacy acting as a constant reminder of the nature of the filters of human discourse. The element of subjectivity is present in any human activity; since a researcher will always have a point of view that somehow personalizes the research, including some things, exaggerating others, and leaving some out altogether. Bias, though linked to subjectivity, is not entirely the same: it is the expression of a conscious or unconscious preference. Bias can be generated by any personal variables – age, sex, religion, sexuality, race – and less about a point of view and more about how ideas or people fit or fail to fit the moral system of the researcher. Bias may be explicit and easy to identify or, more commonly, lurk as a background noise in the research. Subjectivity and bias can be considered together as the personal element, from knowledge of individual interviewees to personal perspectives on the issues involved. The researcher needs to reflect constantly on the research process in relation to these issues.

3.5: Writing up

The process of writing up is essentially one where data is collated and interpreted. However, the process of coding, analyzing and interpreting is far from neutral: the process ends up *representing* a population which is unknown to an audience. In doing so the question is whether the writer does violence to more sophisticated views which may have been more subtle, and which may by now have changed: "it is to [sic] easy to play fast and loose with the concept of identities" (Ball, Maguire and Macrae, 2001: 150). Representing a population or a set of ideas common to a part of a population for the purposes of research will always be a struggle between accuracy and research needs (Rubin and Rubin, 1995: 11) and the needs of the narrative itself.

If there are clear stages in research when the researcher feels a level of development is reached or passed, writing up may be the last and most radical stage (Lofland and Lofland, 1995). It is not simply a passive stage where information gathered during coding and analysis somehow jumps onto the page; it is a further and crucial stage of analysis (Maykut and Morehead, 1994) or hyper-analysis as ideas are reordered and new ideas arrive in the research narrative. Equally important, but particularly difficult, is then knowing what can be jettisoned to make the narrative clearer. Compression often means leaving out examples which may have taken time and emotional expense to develop; losing well-worked details or parts of interviews to which the researcher has become attached (Wolcott, 2001: 69).

Writing helps clarify (Maykut and Morehead, 1994: 151) and reach forward beyond the previous assumptions of the research field. In this sense it is as much a period of discovery as the qualitative and quantitative research has been. Perhaps because the coding and analysis are behind one, writing up becomes a consolidating intellectual experience, during which data is organized, adequately introduced and sorted (Wolcott, 2001: 32). The process of fitting everything together as a single, cogent narrative should sharpen the focus of the original research questions, but not lose sight of them.

3.6: Conclusion

The overall aim of the methodology was to focus research as precisely and generatively as possible on Omani education bureaucrats, teacher trainers and a lecturer most directly

involved in the provision of SEN education, hoping that what is finally written about the subjects "retain at least some sense of who these people are" (Ball, Maguire and Macrae, 2000: 142). Methodology was chosen with the intention of doing least violence to the data set, and allowing the most accurate representation of their views and practices. To this end a mixed approach was used, with an initial questionnaire followed by two phases of interviews; qualitative methodology was followed by limited quantitative statistical analysis which was then followed by a return to qualitative analysis. This chapter has examined the issues raised by the methodology: by the role of the "participant researcher" (Pole and Lampard, 2002) and her positioning throughout the research; by the issues of language use, its translation and transcription; through the ethics of conducting research in a society which, for various reasons, treasures its political privacy; into the ways in which the use of data may liberate the researcher and allow a writing stage which could fully do justice to those on whom the entire study rests and concerning whom the study's questions are designed. The aim of allowing a group its rightful social presence (Patton, 1990) and expression through the medium of research, should mix scientific rigour with a creative approach (Fetterman, 1998). For these research purposes qualitative research methods seemed to be the most appropriate.

The aim of the methodology was to generate data through a system of open sampling of a group of respondents (Strauss and Corbin, 1997). Constraints of time and resources signalled a need for restriction. However, breadth can be made up for by depth. The second phase data set of 18 was analytically constructed in order to guarantee a rich source of data and generative source of theory. Importantly, it is possible with a small

range of respondents to reach theoretical saturation (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 214) and create a strong theoretical narrative.

The particular methodology was, therefore, used to anchor the researcher and to liberate her by using a range of "interpretative practices" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 3) which did not overwhelm the data set but rather enhanced their humanity and did justice to them and their social setting. From this comes the hope that the study will offer useful insights into current Omani SEN provision.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF POLICY-MAKERS' AND BUREAUCRATS' PERSPECTIVES

This chapter examines the discursive perspectives of a group of eight key policy-makers and bureaucrats in the field of SEN and teacher training. This group was chosen partly because of the important roles the members play in Oman's nascent SEN provision, and partly because most were willing to speak openly and directly about their work in English – avoiding the time consuming need for transcription and translation.

The four respondents whose interviews were used initially for coding and analysis – Mariam, Noora, Badr and Sara, chosen out of the eight people initially interviewed – are a good cross-section of the educational establishment in Oman. Two work in relevant Ministries, the third in SEN provision, and the fourth is a university lecturer. The interviews themselves were semi-structured. The analysis of these four was later built on with the addition of a further four bureaucrats: Hind, Saajda, Nawal and Khalifa. The analysis of the latter four augmented and developed the insights generated by the initial interviews. The data was coded and key themes emerged (see table 3.5); these themes could then be further synthesized into examination of the roles of context, ideology and terminology, helping highlight the concepts unique to Omani SEN education policy-making, provision and teacher training, and those areas where concepts and policy do not fit.

4.1 Context

Context refers to the nature of the social and, specifically, educational environments in which the interviewees live and work: there are therefore political aspects to the contextual details. The overall context of Omani education – as a struggle to recognize the importance of literacy and numeracy – is one in which previous cultural practices are being overlaid and replaced by new ones. The practices of older generations were determined by a socio-cultural environment which failed to recognize the need for certain skills if Oman was to evolve smoothly with other Gulf nations and the wider world (see chapter 1).

> … [I]t [is] so important and crucial if we want any development in Oman for the future. We have to put a lot of effort in the field of adult literacy … . They did not go to schools; they did not have any opportunities. The children were beginning to go to school, but the parents had not [gone], so there was little that you could do to develop the nation if that age group – you know the matured, the working group was not educated and could not cope with the developed culture. (Noora, interviewed 2001)

The Omani context is one in which a *caesura* exists between generations – perhaps not a remarkable observation considering that more the 50% of the population is under 15 – where the older generation is characterized not so much by a resistance to change but rather by a cultural dislocation that *excludes* them from modernity. In terms of SEN awareness and the policy and practice that generates provision and teacher training, Noora's observation is pertinent: instead of a seamless transition between generations and pedagogical practices, there is rapid and dramatic change. In this context the issue of SEN may be obscured by the effort needed more generally to create and sustain a

"developed culture": in such a context the finer issues of pedagogy, such as small groups who may or may not be adequately provisioned, may be lost.

An example of a lack of pedagogical fine tuning may be the manner in which those with SEN were served by dogmatically repeating the process of education – going back a year and starting again – rather than changing the process itself. In the recent initial developmental period in Oman for certain types of SEN – those who may have had a range of needs that lowered average attainment – the methodology was simply to keep students repeating years. Mariam recognizes the inadequacy of this system.

> Now what was happening is that we did have students who did have mild mental disabilities, but we often had students who were coming in from the regular schools who went through the system, whereby they would fail the first year and then they would repeat and then they would go on to the second class and then they would fail and repeat. (Mariam, interviewed 2001)

In the days before SENs were recognized more broadly there was little choice but to be held in this loop: subtlety did not exist when coping with educational "problems".

> So those kids will be sent to us because it was assumed that they also had mental difficulties or mild mental disabilities, problems, and when they came into us, we sometimes would say, we were not really sure that these kids don't belong here but we were told that they don't have any other choice, this is where they would fit in and in most cases and a lot of these kids may be fourteen or twelve and most of them couldn't even write their names. (Mariam, interviewed 2001)

The context of Omani education – a system still working as a relatively new and untested thing – is one in which simple pedagogical approaches are more easily understood: these can be made to fit more readily and rapidly, and offer fewer problems of curricular costs

in terms of materials or teachers. From a seventeenth century perspective, Rabelais (1973), writing in the sixteenth century, would easily have recognized and berated the pedagogy. Although a symposium was organized by the Ministry of Education in March 2005 to address these deficiencies, much of school education in Oman still relies on rote learning, perhaps partly because of a deficit of properly qualified staff, or staff willing or able to teach experimentally because of curricular, vocational or other constraints (Al Belushi, 2003).

> We were not teaching skills, we depended a lot on memorization and we depended on teaching things that would really help them out in real life situations and I think that was my main concern and later when I moved into the curriculum department, I felt even more that this is true because the curriculum department with the basic education, they were trying to get away from teaching students things that were irrelevant to them. (Mariam, interviewed 2001)

Since memorization is a main teaching strategy it is logical that this strategy would also be applied to children with SEN. In fact, those with SEN are more rather than less likely to be exposed to such pedagogy since strategies for teaching those with SENs are often more about controlling than educating (see chapter 6.2.1); the more adventurous pedagogic techniques will hardly appeal to under-qualified, under-resourced or under-motivated teachers (Al Belushi, 2003). Sticking with a set curriculum provides comfort to unmotivated teachers – the relevance of what is taught to those individuals being taught will rarely be considered. If there are curricular changes to be made these are unlikely to be instituted rapidly.

> A lot of efforts are now being put in to provide a long-term curriculum at least consisting of Arabic, arithmetic or basic books. Thank God, we tried a lot over the

> past couple of years and were able to set out guidelines. We are now waiting for the expert to come and a committee to be formed to write up books designed for the students of intellectual education. (Khalifa, interviewed 2001)

The movement away from a one-size-fits-all curriculum towards a holistic educational system adapted to a variety of needs is a feature of some current responses to SEN, but the overall perception of educational policy in the hands of beneficent authority has not changed. The reliance on committees and experts develops a complexity within Omani pedagogy despite the top-down policy process, but experts may be part of a system delegating important activity, rather than meeting SEN. Khalifa does not suggest any new approach: there is a lot of smoke and no discernable fire; the child with SEN still waits for the appropriate curriculum.

Another contextual feature in Oman is that all subjects and all levels of education are dependant to some extent on expatriate teaching staff.

> Omar bin al Khattab has three administrative faculties and had no Omani female teachers except the social worker, four teachers from Egypt carrying diplomas. … We have some Omani female teachers now with at least one and a half or two years' experience … expatriates complete four years and go back home … . They have many years' experience not less than four years in their native country. We now recruit the expat teacher who has good potential and performance. … [W]e recruit teachers from Egypt but we also have teachers from Tunisia who come in the second place after Egyptians even though they are few. The Tunisians are good teachers but they have problems with the language. (Khalifa, interviewed 2001)

What might "potential" mean in the context of four-year contracts? These teachers might have no SEN training, and little experience of SENs in the classroom, and are unlikely to be motivated to update or change their pedagogy. The usual needs of an educational

structure – continuity, IST for those within the system, a sense among teachers of loyalty – are perhaps less common in expatriate teachers who may have little commitment to develop even in the mainstream classroom. Expatriate teachers are less likely to understand specific SENs in the Omani context. In SEN provision "we don't even get 10%" (Mariam, interviewed 2001) of staff who are Omanis – which seems to contradict the official figures and questionnaire results (see chapter 5.2 and table 5.1). In the early 1990s, when oil revenue was running down, "Omanization" (see chapter 1.1) seemed to make economic and social sense.

> Thus in general the percentage of Omani staff is increasing in all colleges because there is a systematic plan to Omanize the teaching staff. (Sara, interviewed 2001)

Where there had been extensive reliance on recruitment from the Indian sub-continent and other Arab states the aim of the Ministry of Development was now to accelerate and promote the employment of Omanis (Ministry of Development, 1997: 213). Currently (2005) the percentage of Omanis employed in the labour force runs at approximately 22%. By 2020 the aim is to increase this to 50%. For education, Omanization should have a positive effect, in the sense that it offers the opportunity of widening understanding of all educational levels amongst ordinary Omanis, and thus engaging them in the process of provision rather than just engineering provision without there being any real involvement. In the provision of SEN, understanding and increased awareness are keys to effectiveness.

While awareness of disability is growing in Oman, there is an increasing gap between such awareness and the legal provision the state offers. Such gaps open up in all areas of

society, between older legal provision and recognition or lack of it and evolving perceptions of certain social phenomena.

> The field of disability has grown so very fast; it's growing every day. I work in this [field] but only now have I realised how fast things are changing and these people [expatriate SEN teachers] are not prepared for those changes so they deal with our kids in Oman the same way they were trained twenty years ago. (Noora, interviewed 2001)

Omanis may be more motivated to provide and develop SEN provision and more determined to do so than non-Omanis. Another reason for Omanization is that expatriates might be less willing to experiment or put forward imaginative suggestions or take part in risky strategies: expatriates may not be a good resource of energy, ideas or novel theories of provision and implementation.

> There is no incentive for those [expatriates] engaged in the special education compared to what is happening in the Gulf and Arab states where the teacher of special education differs from the general education teacher. (Khalifa, interviewed 2001)

In Oman, certain developments are taking place. For example, there is the Pilot Project underway in the Batneh region.

> Development, I think the biggest you ask me is the Pilot Project. If we do manage to integrate, I think this is the biggest achievement. (Mariam, interviewed 2001)

This project does not go as far as any real forms of integration or inclusion, but does move away from current segregationist practices, and Mariam recognizes the significance of this. Hind considers the Project can offer "a way forward" and thus "positive benefits

for teachers and society" in terms of limited integration, while nonetheless leaving some students "segregated for minor special needs" (Hind, interviewed 2001) This begs again questions of what is "major" and what is "minor". The Pilot Project deals only with inclusion of those with SENs into primary or basic education classrooms. Mariam seems to believe that other parts of the education system are less flexible and thus less able to benefit from integrationist practice. The first year was completed in June 2001.

> [T]he integration project is one of the most important projects. We receive a lot of students who could be treated and absorbed in the ordinary schools … . [A]nd let me ask, [those] who have no chance in intellectual education, where can they go? To the street? (Khalifa, interviewed 2001)

The motivation behind the Project is mixed. Part of the aim seems to be treatment in a more convenient location, though for whose convenience is unclear. There also remains a segregationist mentality, since SEN students are still perceived in large to "have no chance in the intellectual education". Finally, Khalifa is suggesting that such projects as this are aimed at some kind of basic social engineering; keeping children "off the street" and therefore under control. Mariam sees the Project as offering some chances for those with SEN through its flexibility, but suggests no deeper measurable achievement of the Project.

> I think the biggest reform is that with basic education, I think special needs have been taken into account, [the] proof [is] that we are having this Project coming in even though it's still in the early stages. A lot of basic education by itself will account for special needs better than the other traditional systems because of the flexibility you have through self learning. (Mariam, interviewed 2001)

The pressures of demographic change in Oman may lead to contextual changes which are limited. These changes are just enough to provide "proof" that something is being done: that SENs are being met. The Omani educational context seems to be one where SEN can best be served if those with SENs cause the least awkwardness or disruption – this is maintaining a *status quo* as the least disruptive alternative. In this context SENs are best met within primary education where no awkward problems of organization or ideology are likely to be asked. Also primary education has seen a significant decrease in class sizes, teaching with greater interactivity and the introduction of "life skills" into the curriculum as part of a current raft of changes to basic education. As numbers of those with SENs increase with the growth in the numbers of Omanis in full time primary and secondary education, and there is an increasing incidence of genetic problems leading to SEN, so the context of education shifts from one in which provision is the key to modernization to one where provision is a tool of control. Difficulties need to be controlled.

> Awareness of SEN or "learning difficulties" has generated an increase in the numbers described as "having problems". I have seen this recently… kids who have mild, like some hearing problems, are also considered as having learning difficulties in Oman. These problems can lead to … more difficulties. (Mariam, interviewed 2001)

This is not a change unique to Oman. Tomlinson (1982; 1985) makes the same point regarding the UK, and in support of this, each year since the introduction of statementing in 1994 the number of statemented students has increased.

A development begun in Oman within the last ten years is the involvement of NGOs (chapter 1.4.1) such as UN bodies. Of course this is not only a phenomenon linked to education or health, but is linked to growing globalization and reorienting the economy away from oil. The positive side to the involvement of NGOs is that they can bring in expertise from outside the country and apply it at a local rather than bureaucratically distant level. The negative side might be that some states with weak educational infrastructure could come to rely on NGOs, and however much NGO staff may try to train up local people to take their place, this training is heavily dependent on the establishment of a sympathetic social environment.

> Now I am also involved in other agencies other than UNICEF, involving [the] ILO [International Labour Organization – a UN body], they have offered us some trainers; and we are doing some projects that we want to present to them as well. … We had two NGOs, and now we have a third one, which is working for the disabled. The first one was the Oman Handicapped Society, and then Child Society for Handicapped … and then we have for the blind and we have the fourth one, which is the Early Intervention, which has just been started. (Noora, interviewed 2001)

Many NGOs are the sole providers of SEN care, for example the Oman Handicapped Society. In terms of provision in the short term this may be basic but it is practical.

> The International Labour Organisation … is interested in vocational training, training people for labour, getting them ready for work. We have told them that we need your help as far as the disabled are concerned, so they are working with us in terms of training the disabled in Marakiz Al Wafa. (Noora, interviewed 2001)

Within the Gulf region, other help has been received from the UN for the Zaid Agricultural Project (ZAP) in Abu Dhabi. The ZAP have approached Oman and Noora

said she felt an interest in becoming involved. Yet while Noora seems enthusiastic about many such initiatives, she does not offer a clear suggestion of the structure within which the NGOs will work, or how they will develop their work in Oman. Perhaps this is because the exact roles of NGOs have not yet been identified by those used to complete control of state provision. Noora sees a lot of the developments as positive.

4.1.1: Hierarchical context of educational bureaucracy

All bureaucracies are built around some kind of hierarchical system that has both inbuilt advantages and disadvantages (Foucault, 1977). That said, the *more* hierarchical a system – the more decisions are referred upwards for clearance, and the less lower echelons feel they can think and act creatively without needing an all clear – the less effective it may be at coping with change, especially when such change is linked to subtle nuances of ideology, as is the case with SEN. This situation was seen to typify Oman in the views of the key respondents and there was certainly a cynicism generated by perceived bureaucratic incompetence.

> I was in the educational activities, especially the educational media. I joined the Ministry of Education in 1991 … and later I was head of Technical Activities Division, and then deputy director of Educational Activities in the field of educational media. … I have been here for two years and you can see a discrepancy in the department's name. We are in the [Division of] Special Education [and it] has nothing to do with that name. … There is confusion and the two divisions are like different rivers that would never meet … . (Khalifa, interviewed 2001)

Such a criticism may be common amongst those working in bureaucracies, and there can certainly be criticisms of poor intercommunication levelled generally at hierarchies. SEN

relies on such communication to facilitate any real advances in provision. Khalifa doubts that much will change: if this is the case, then SEN provision may be hindered even by those who would applaud its implementation. Cynicism can be as much a block as outright opposition. (Al Belushi, 2003) Nevertheless there is optimism.

> Frankly there is increasing attention from the Government of those of special needs. We have societies and centres of Ministry of Social Affairs, we have volunteers in these centres to look after the blind, mentally retarded and handicapped. Should we have a secondary school volunteer in one of these centres which started to serve the public, they can transfer severe cases to our schools or to the institute. (Nawal, interviewed 2001)

This is optimism not based on activity *within* the hierarchy, but rather on activity by volunteers. If such people do not offer themselves then, presumably, the Ministries would simply accept the *status quo* and decrease their attention to SEN. There seems a very haphazard approach to provision.

> We are trailing behind from the educational and instructional side. We only have Al Amal School for the Deaf and Intellectual Education which is dedicated for the mentally retarded, and now Oman Ibn al Khattab Institute for the Blind and we have some facilities, but we are not able to have all students available registered. (Nawal, interviewed 2001)

Understanding how the Omani education bureaucracy works is useful in considering how changes may be implemented. Oman has moved very quickly from a feudal society into a society where the head of state is seeking to devolve power and create the beginnings of an accountable system (Ministry of Information, 2004). However, old ways of thinking persist, and highly bureaucratized societies like Oman tend to be resistant to change.

An important question which arose in these initial interviews was: will the provision for education to those with SEN be different in Oman because of this hierarchical structure? Will current political moves be reflected in a greater willingness to adapt provision for those with SEN? Badr's responses are typical of the respondents' views. For him change is centred round reorganization of academic ranking, and shows there remains a great deal of conservatism within the system.

> Sometimes six months or so we are thinking of decentralising this process by allocating some funds to the colleges and they can make their own decisions, all what they need to do is identify the components and then from that they can work on and we will try to allocate some amount of money for each college around 3000 R.O. or so for each college. (Badr, interviewed 2001)

Little effective decentralization can be managed on RO 3000 per annum (approximately €8,000).

There is resistance from established hierarchies to new practice – it would be highly unusual if there were not. Although there are now the beginnings of redistribution, power was and remains highly centralized in Oman, and it may prove difficult for those engaged in new practices such as special education to manoeuvre their way through.

> Here when I moved to the ministry, it was a little bit different. I think that the people at ministry, at least the feeling I got when I came in, the people were used to one man's decisions. The people who followed me and who were before me were men. Usually men don't tend to … sort of…. may be they just feel that it's sign of weakness. I don't feel that way. I feel that you can lose out a lot if you don't ask or consult the people around you. (Mariam, interviewed 2001)

Mariam recognizes the dual problems: decision-making was concentrated in the office of a single person, and that person had traditionally been male. Dealing with women in positions of authority, especially in a traditional Muslim society such as Oman, could be difficult. There has been an effort from the top to change attitudes.

> His Majesty actually … reached a point where he wanted to see women in policy-making positions. The time had come that he wanted to involve and give them their role. I am sure there were a lot of us who were recommended. (Noora, interviewed 2001)

One way to overcome structural inadequacies may be to widen the level of adult education, both by extending postgraduate courses and beginning IST. There is some cause for optimism here.

> [T]here is real participation in many of the activities in and outside the Sultanate especially in the GCC countries, in order to get stock of the latest developments in this intellectual education field. The special education itself is delivering new branches day after day, and we should follow these changes daily. We also follow up schools and it is a good thing to impart more knowledge to the teacher and try to provide him with the books. … [N]ot all the teachers have the required experience. (Khalifa, interviewed 2001)

It may be that the context of power in Oman is not as clear-cut as it at first seems. Pressure from innovation and expertise may begin to affect the technologies of power themselves (Foucault, 1975) over the medium to longer term.

4.1.2: Resources: international and national/local

There are two aspects to resources: first the spectrum of availability and second the costs incurred. Oman's growing contact with international agencies such as UNICEF or the

ILO is clearly important because it costs the Omani government little or nothing to facilitate, and it generates a great deal of useful communication. However, behind much of the thinking in SEN provision come notions of the availability and distribution of resources. "There are many financial constraints; I want to do so much to overcome lack of awareness" (Hind, interviewed 2001). This is a clear dilemma for every state, how to decide which services should enjoy what percentage of the government's annual budget. (Berlak and Berlak, 1981) Certainly Oman is facing new budgetary constraints as oil revenue shrinks, while the global economic situation remains partly dependent on a political situation within the Middle East which itself is increasingly uncertain. Every ministry has had to become much more prudent, in ways perhaps not considered during the oil boom of the 1970s and early 1980s. Now the dilemmas facing Oman include tensions between prioritising needs and funding what has to be funded – within education this means primary, secondary and tertiary education have a priority. The existing priorities are simple, and provision for groups such as those with SEN has never been considered an important part of the educational package.

Prioritisation of resources in Oman is more likely to mean education bureaucrats take the route most easily explained to their immediate superiors, and the route with which they themselves have most sympathy. The logic is, if the numbers with SEN are not great, then there is no reason to establish good practice in provision. There is thus a clear link between resources and prevalence of a particular recipient of those resources. The need for continuous medical attention for some of those with certain types of SEN (for example, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder – ADHD) may mean ministerial

authorities decide against continuing provision. Should schools control their own budgets then it is even more likely that decisions will be made which exclude those groups considered most expensive and least "central" to the core educational ideology – those Badr would label "normal".

> ... [T]o have more departments and divisions and units in special needs you need to think of the feasibility and the numbers that you - that depends on the statistics and the figures of the disabled people in Oman and we have six colleges and we cannot offer to open all this in the six colleges. Maybe in 2 or 3 of these colleges and we don't want to recruit people for short time and then to get rid of them. (Badr, interviewed 2001)

Badr is displaying caution and a certain amount of confusion: percentages of those with SEN, if shown to be low enough, could be an excuse to decrease available resources. How many within full-time education (from 6 to 18) have some kind of SEN will vary depending on what criteria are used and what perspective is espoused. If an argument is made that the number of those with SEN is low, then another cause for medium and long-term concern would thus not be the figures but rather reliance on the good will of staff.

> I can tell you the new generation is coming in ... like they had 2 or 3 years of experience and they are fresh from their schools into the field. They are creative, they teach ... they innovate, they improve, and they spend their own money to make sure if something is not available they just spend their own money to make sure they bring in what is required. There is a lot of motivation, modification and commitment with the new generation. (Mariam, interviewed 2001)

While Mariam admits that the "new generation" is motivated, that they can "modify" the system to make it work better and that they are committed to SEN teaching, such commitment is vulnerable to wear over time (Al Belushi, 2003). The motivation of one

generation can turn into the apathy or disinterest of another. Also, such motivation may be as much based on the novelty of the activity – care for those with SEN – as on any deeper ideological commitment. Thus, even within one generation, what begins with hope and energy may quickly burn out, especially if results are slow and difficult to achieve (Al Belushi, 2003). Since much social change is amelioratory rather than swift and exciting, even key workers may soon find their dynamism dampened by systemic and bureaucratic disinterest.

There are sources for hope within Oman, and one may be the involvement of the private sector.

> [L]et me ask: what is the role of the private sector in supporting the special education process in the Sultanate? If shaikh A took an initiative, where are the others? The private sector still sees this matter from a narrow point-of-view. We should force the private sector to contribute. In some cases the private sector is aware of the situation but no one takes an interest. Other Gulf States set rules for the private sector. … I am waiting for the private sector's role and we need rules to regulate this. Things are now ad hoc. A shaikh or a businessman comes to contribute voluntarily, but if they do not come no one will approach them. No, we should force them somehow to contribute and here is the government's role … and the role of educated people in society. (Khalifa, interviewed 2001)

There may be benefits from involving the private sector in order to lower budgetary demands on government funds, though Khalifa sees problems with any reliance on such funding. His concept of *enforcement* may seem unusual to a Western perspective, but he is in earnest: this is a tax by a unique method, but private sector involvement may not be as productive if enforced. Certainly there would be considerable resistance to such a tax from non-Omani companies seeking to operate in the Sultanate. The implicit message

from Khalifa is that altruism is no motivation among Omani entrepreneurs. What is being struggled with here is the concept of social rights and obligations – the idea of the role of the bourgeois *Leviathan* (Hobbes, 1975) or of a *Contrat social* (Rousseau, 1968) – which is as new as the idea of an Omani nation state.

The movement to involve the private sector with public services, known in the UK and US as the Public/Private Partnership (PPS) but which is no real partnership but rather a borrowing of private money with public guarantees, is an extension of fiscal philosophies developed during the 1970s and 1980s. These recognized the limited budgetary resources of governments and sought to maintain growth and investment in public services without the usual concomitant and unpopular rises in taxation.

> The development that we have seen is … having some of the schools were being built, having the private sector come in and build a school like [Omar bin Khatab School] that's a big step. Again I think it's a big step and it's the first step and hopefully in the future we have more people doing that, because I think the community has to get involved when it comes to supporting special needs. (Mariam, interviewed 2001)

A lot depends not on the local temporary involvement of a like-minded group – perhaps an Omani version of the Women's Institute – but rather on how community itself is perceived, and how individual identity works within that community: vulnerable resource allocation is linked to the way SEN is perceived and understood. Those areas of education which receive the lion's share of the education budget also gain kudos. Since this kudos builds on what is already in place, it should not be difficult to imagine how a cycle of investment leads to higher esteem, and lack of investment leads to lower esteem.

From outside the SEN provision system, poor facilities or no facilities speak volumes: a parent's argument might be, if something is not worth funding properly, then it cannot be a serious part of education provision for my child. Many new developments (the widening of postgraduate courses and the introduction of in-service training) are dependent on overcoming considerable budgetary restraints.

> They [new courses] cost a lot and most of the university's budget is concentrating on the undergraduate students. ... In addition there is a kind of revision for the existing programmes to find out their relevancy to the needs and to introduce alternative programmes which are desperately needed and the programmes which are no longer demanded in the labour market should be stopped. (Sara, interviewed 2001)

Under these restraints, SEN developments may be severely hampered in the short and medium terms and limited resources will always be a problem of educational provision. At different times different priorities will make themselves felt as policy-makers seek to be seen as positive, concerned and careful, whether in terms of managing a budget or reacting to social needs: SEN is a highly contested and politicised area.

At the national level the role of the head of state in encouraging and guiding change is significant. Mariam's interview shows that it is to the Sultan that bureaucrats and educators go to ask for funding, and it is to the Sultan that they appeal for legal changes needed to assist SEN provision. In general, interviewees were not optimistic regarding the use of SEN funding (Sajdaa, interviewed 2001), and while provision may be achieved by creating optimum savings elsewhere: this cannot be an effective rule for provision of any service. However, not all interviewees were pessimistic about the availability or use

of funding. Noora saw the likelihood of a budgetary expansion linked to a less hierarchical, more collaborative, simpler and more transparent structure of educational provision.

> One of the things that I have done was to open the field to collaboration. Before it used be Ministry of Social Affairs, the only agency or the only ministry that was concerned with care of the disabled, Ministry of Education took care of education of the disabled and Ministry of Health takes care of the condition and services. But [the] Ministry of Social Affairs is supposed to be the ones who are responsible for the care of the disabled. It used to be only us [Ministry of Social Affairs] and we had very limited funds to devote to this field. What I encouraged when I went there to open the field and allow collaboration from the community, from the private sector, from people who are willing to help who have funds that they want to give. … So that's how the disabled now they are able to share a place where the children could go to and get care, can be educated if educable[1], and we have also been able to get funds for transport for buses to go pick the children wherever they are and bring them to the centres. (Noora, interviewed 2001)

As noted in chapter 1.1 (see map, figure 1.1), Oman's geography often mitigates against easy access to schools even for those without SEN.

> And shortcomings, I will say also again sometimes this means the location. I was … in some places, not very highly populated places like Ibri, that do not have enough schools. [The task is difficult] to bring students if we want [them] here to Muscat [even if] the roads are good. Like in Sur we have to travel 100 kilometres and just imagine a student, if you take him a 100 kilometres and bring him back 100 kilometres, how will he go [to school] tomorrow? (Sajdaa, interviewed 2001)

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[1] "Educable" is a very difficult word - as can be seen by its use in the UK. Who can determine what exactly creates the optimum psychological conditions for educability? How are tests relevant to that determination? At what age should this judgement best be made? If made too early the dangers are that the child will be excluded from the system, and lose any chances for education it may otherwise have enjoyed. If made too late, much time and expense may have been allocated to little purpose. And in *what* may or may not a child be educable? As may be seen with the ZAP, simple tasks are still taught and can be learnt, and this may still be called education.

This is not an argument about geography, but about the resistant nature of established discourses of educational provision. What effect should and does population size have on government and its attitude to services: specifically health and education but also SEN? Policy is not necessarily a factor of the pressure felt from population groups alone.

> We faced a problem as the number of students is too small – this is logical given the development of health care in the Sultanate. (Khalifa, interviewed 2001)

The answer, for Khalifa, is to increase the age range of those being offered services at the Omar Ibn al Khattab Institute for the Blind – to engineer the applicability of provision to a group large enough to make some impact on policy-making.

4.1.3: Developing concepts in the educational context

There is a clear recognition of the need to improve SEN provision by in-service teacher training in Oman. Just because a teacher has been through an initial training system, this may not be the end of the story.

> [Main developments include] basic education, more emphasis on training and in-service training in education, curriculum, even curriculum in education. Teachers must [be aware of] new ideas. (Badr, interviewed 2001)

However, these new developments may seem a little basic.

> In educational technology we have IT and English, mostly these two areas for all the staff, and we have teaching assistants, if we design a [SEN] programme for them to teach. Also computer and English and we teach them something in statistics

> and how to study, gain some research skills, to write a paper and we try to develop their [understanding of] statistics. (Badr, interviewed 2001)

This indicates the way SEN is perceived, as a need for which a programme can be developed relatively easily, almost as a plug-in addition rather than anything more fundamental. Who, it should be asked, is going to design the programme, and what are their qualifications? From Badr's interview, it looks at though the IST SEN courses for teachers will simply help top up existing skills rather than develop new ways of thinking. No specifics, or awareness of the complexity of the task being faced by teacher trainers, are volunteered by Badr: was this simply because the point was not pursued in the interview, or is this the limit of his imagination where SEN is concerned?

When developments are not basic plug-ins, they are non-existent. SEN hardly makes any impression on the higher levels of decision-makers according to Noora (interviewed 2001). Perhaps the pressures within the academic council and related committees are more related to meeting targets that are mainstream priorities, while SEN is considered somehow less of priority.

> Actually it [SEN] is never discussed. It is not presented, even through the academic or the curriculum committee or the academic council. It is may be discussed in the student affairs [committee] but not with us. … [Problems with integration] facilities may be part of it, training of teachers is part of it, because they don't have the skills, staff also, not only staff in terms of teachers, but other non-counselling, they have a problem with that. They have a shortage of staff. That might affect [provision]. … Awareness among school principals, they are aware of [SEN] and see the significance of [methods that] will help. But if they are not aware they still resist … and they will feel it is a burden on them. (Badr, interviewed 2001)

It is notable here that Badr uses the word "burden", part of the negative discourse that links to his comments on those with SEN impinging on and removing the rights of "normal" people by having needs – such as wheelchair access – met (see chapter 6.5). What can be heard in Badr's response is the call for a cultural, ideological and resource / finance shift.

It may also be easier to allocate SEN to those specialists traditionally charged with "treating" those not considered adequate in the educational system. This is part of the pathologization of SEN (chapter 2.2; chapter 6.3.1) described by Fulcher (1999). IST for SEN teachers seems more comfortably allocated for some of the interviewees to the Department of Psychology, which affects teacher training for SEN and how the system overall works.

Should departments of psychology be involved? In London University, for example, the Institute of Education has a Department of Psychology and SEN – though this has changed its name to the School of Psychology and Human Development. In systems with evolving attitudes to SEN provision, where people have not been exposed to debates on disability, use of departments of psychology may simply continue pathologization.

> I think at the Ministry of Education they are responsible. They have their own training centres now in-service but sometimes they ask our [colleges of education] faculty members, our staff to participate to run these workshops or courses. If they ask us, why not? But now only the Psychology Department and I think that it's the only department who can. (Badr, interviewed 2001)

In much the same way, and according to a similar discourse, SEN may become pathologized through a system of assessments. Instead of creating a system which includes *all* students under one system, assessments may continue a sense of apartness felt by those with SEN. This would be even more certain if assessments were carried out by a health authority via a hospital.

> We get a lot of the assessments now done in SQU hospital. Dr. Sara [works with] the poor and it's working. At least the assessments we have there are sort of detailed and they tell us if they were not able to assess the child. They tell us that the child did not respond, so we are not able, we don't get his reports. The previous reports will come in [and] would be so and so: IQ 70, we didn't know how they reached it, what are the problems, what was the case history? ... We put a lot of emphasis on doing case studies with the parents. (Mariam, interviewed 2001)

Just as SEN-related in service training is considered best done by the Department of Psychology at SQU or at TTCs, so the University hospital and its IQ measuring process is considered the best way to assess SEN students. Perhaps this is an attempt to shift responsibility to specialized and self-contained departments.

Some concepts here and later in the core interviews remain beyond the understanding or practice of the majority of the interviewees – notably integration and inclusion. After all, even where debate about SEN and disability has a longer history and greater coverage, when deeply imbedded notions such as normality are threatened there will be considerable resistance.

> The other thing that I was trying very hard and I think we are trying now is this whole issue of integration. I sent in a couple of recommendations when I was in the school, telling them that a lot of kids can be integrated, but I did not realize it is not

> so easy, because [many teachers] don't want to integrate [even] if the school system is ready to accept [the change]. (Mariam, interviewed 2001)

It may be one thing using the terminology, and quite another either to understand or implement the practices the terminology represents. Hegarty (1993) indicates some possible future difficulties for inclusion, and admits that present and past ideologies inevitably affect how new ideas may be understood and implemented. It is possible that no society is ever ready for the implementation of an idea as radical as inclusion. Its radical nature means that not only teachers but also bureaucracies can never be fully ready: perhaps the most to be hoped for is an openness of mind among the greatest number.

> It was always "the school system is not ready", so when this idea came in and when they finally decided … a lot of people were telling the ministry to integrate, integrate, integrate and [the] ministry was in a position to say ok. But if we do, do we know that the community is ready? Do we know that the teachers are ready? Do we have the technical assistance that we need? (Mariam, interviewed 2001)

Mariam asks the questions probably not asked by those in the hierarchy which should be asking them. Integration (chapter 2.3) is a complex idea, linked onward to significant philosophical and political issues, and to the issue of inclusion. Would parents or other students or the teaching staff understand? In the UK attempts to introduce levels of inclusion into the mainstream have met with some resistance from teachers (Beveridge, 1999). The need for radical ideas to promote equality (Hegarty and Lucas, 1978) may seem irrelevant to a teacher who has to deal with disruptive and resistant pupils on a daily basis. Both integration and inclusion entail significant technical assistance and could create some animosity among teachers.

In this section some of the key contextual factors that play critical roles in SEN education policy and practice in Oman have been explored. This has included a consideration of the social, political, historical and geographic elements which affect education and provision for those with SENs. The way the Omani educational policy system works – through a hierarchical system which controls the working of the power technologies within the state – was described, as was the cynicism this may sometimes engender among education professionals. Resources – in terms of local and international NGOs – and the shrinking of the oil factor in the Omani context were also described. Finally, some consideration was given to new concepts and their impact within Omani education – specifically the way these may be developing within a pathologizing paradigm of provision.

4.2: Ideology

The second main theme concerned the ideological component emerging from the interviews. Ideology is contextually embedded, and picks up those explicit issues described in 4.1. This section attempts to examine deeper, more implicit structures.

For the purpose of this research ideology is taken to mean a set of ideas and beliefs which exist dynamically within a society, creating modes of thought which may be reflected in the organs of government and the services they provide. Ideology may often be taken as synonymous with discourse – though the latter should, in terms of this research, be considered a larger, deeper and more homologous system: ideologies are personal sometimes fragmentary and contradictory beliefs, and these taken together constitute

discourses, but not the other way round. An ideology in the context of this research is more personal than a discourse, yet wider than a mere opinion. This is using and adapting Arendt's description.

> An ideology differs from a simple opinion in that it claims to possess either the key to history, or the solution to "all the riddles of the universe", or the intimate knowledge of the hidden universal laws which are supposed to rule nature and man. (Arendt, 1992: 39)

A discourse is more expansive, and its unique characteristic is its relationship to power and the tactics of power.

> It is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together. And for this very reason, we must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable. … Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (Foucault, 1990: 100-101)

The difference between ideology and discourse is therefore determined by extent, power and organic nature. These distinctions will be important in exploring the perspectives of the various respondents.

4.2.1: Changes in interviewees' thinking

All societies are affected by other societies and cultures, world events, research, media, domestic political and social change – including education and wealth creation – and, of course, by their histories. This means, essentially, that the way people in different societies *think* alters over time, and therefore the way these interviewees think has

changed. However, this progression is not linear: it would be strange if it were. Ideologies have their own distinct characteristics: a shape that may be thought of 3-dimensionally. Influences on such formations cannot therefore be uniform. Also, maintaining the 3-dimensional analogy, ideologies may have various densities at various points on their surfaces: at some points this suggests that an ideology would be malleable and easy to change; at others it would resist change even to the point of hardening its surface - clinging to the shape and texture it already enjoyed. It may well be that, after 30 years of rapid change; Omanis will not be so receptive to the changes SEN provision demands.

The media can clearly be effective in the spreading of awareness, sensitizing people to the specific needs of others and the processes of change being considered to meet needs, as well as the more subtle processes of reassurance needed to maintain jaded receptivity. Basically, the level of understanding of SENs remains low amongst ordinary Omanis, and so far very few media products challenge this – one, broadcast on Radio Oman in the early mornings has proved very popular, precisely because there is so little choice[2]. The media is key to any ideological change at a nationwide level.

> [T]here is not awareness, and we hope there will be awareness in the media organs. When we launched a media campaign about integration, we used to write in the newspapers as if the public knew what integration means. … After the launch of the

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[2] *Early On* is a weekday breakfast show, which has modelled itself on BBC radio products, using music mixed with interviews and regular contributions on important social issues such as drugs, alcohol, marital breakdown and women's health. It is notable that *Early On* is not funded by the Ministry of Information which runs Radio Oman, but is reliant on private finance almost entirely. It is currently (2005) sponsored by HSBC.

> Oman Handicapped Society, people started to know about those of special needs, and newspapers were useful. (Nawal, interviewed 2001)

What is particular interesting about Nawal's comment is that she used those media likely to reach a more middle class and therefore more cosmopolitan and better informed public. In a society where illiteracy is still a problem, broadcast media is a good choice for spreading information and raising awareness.

What emerged from the interview data were incidences of ideological conflict, tensions and dilemmas. The conflicts and tensions may be caused by hierarchical and bureaucratic stresses, or larger discursive stresses between modernity and tradition. A dilemma may well develop when different, apparently contradictory, ideologies are forced to coexist: there may be aspects of tradition which are at odds with the socio-political dogmas of inclusion, where normality is challenged and difference is encouraged.

Ideologies that develop change priorities and policies over time: their dynamic natures should never be underestimated. Oman's rapid development may create problems associated with some changes that could be described as unnecessary. Oman is vulnerable to those geo-political stresses presently in the region: what is happening in Iraq may well have an impact on the way education is delivered; should SEN provision be seen as a Westernization of Omani culture then there could be a certain amount of reversal of current trends.

Awareness of issues will change: in 1970 there can have been hardly anyone in Oman who knew what SEN were. In some areas in Oman there has been considerable change, and awareness has increased; in other areas – for example some parts of the Omani education bureaucracy – there has been very little change in thinking. Nawal, working at the Ministry of Education, felt there was little interest in SEN.

> When I joined this division … I felt no one pays any attention to this scheme, no one cares. (Nawal, interviewed 2001),

This sense of disinterest is further evinced by Khalifa.

> Another point is I don't see within the Omani community who has interest in the idea … yes [the community's is a] poor approach and mostly based on sympathetic or religious considerations. But there is no real apprehension that this job is part of the human daily affairs in this country or that the disabled is your son or neighbour's son or even your brother. Anyone can be in this situation any time and anyone can change from normal person to disabled who needs support and care. (Khalifa, interviewed 2001)

Part of awareness raising involves building a psychological map based on critiquing definitions of "normal" and "disabled": an awareness which, perhaps predictably, builds on extant ideological and discursive patterns. Badr in particular shows considerable ideological conservatism – "It may be discussed in the student affairs but not with us ..." (Badr, interviewed 2001).

There may be some change in thinking among younger, better educated Omanis, if what Badr is suggesting is that students are the ones who discuss SEN; however, if, as is equally possible, he is suggesting that SEN are only relevant for discussion in terms of

wider undergraduate welfare, then perhaps changes in thinking are not widespread. Badr's responses generally show an awkwardness in this matter, and his attitude was reflected in a tone of voice and body language that were not responsive. If he typically reflects the way those operating in the Omani bureaucracies think, then little change has occurred. Lack of awareness will lead to ideological conservatism and resistance to new ideas.

> Awareness of [SEN by] school principals … if they are not aware they still resist it because they will feel that it is a *burden* on them. (Badr, interviewed 2001) [Respondent's stress]

Changes in thinking may be limited by ideological conservatism and a static interpretation of ideas expressed in terms such as "normal". When Badr worries about SEN training across the board in teacher training colleges, this suggests a level of awareness of the need for a change, but, on the other hand, an unwillingness to go too far with it.

> [T]hat depends on the statistics and the figures of the disabled people in Oman, and we have six colleges and we cannot offer to open all this in the six colleges. Maybe in 2 or 3 of these colleges and we don't want to recruit people for short time and then to get rid of them. (Badr, interviewed 2001)

What may seem like sensible policies relating perhaps to budgetary concerns may equally well be resistance to ideological novelty: it is possible in times of straitened finances that budgets could be used as an excuse. Even in the best of times, demands on budgetary resources will usually be allocated according to the ideological, then pragmatic preferences of finance ministers. Since SEN groups are unlikely to have much political or

financial clout, it is unlikely that they will be regarded as important by finance ministers. One very new item on the education agenda has been the issue of /demj/ (integration and/or inclusion).

> The other thing that I was trying very hard and I think we are doing now is this whole issue of integration. I sent in a couple of recommendations when I was in the school, telling them that a lot of kids can be integrated, but I did realize it is not so easy, because we don't want to integrate if the school systems is not ready to accept. (Mariam, interviewed 2001)

There are two issues here: the first is the interviewee's willingness to try something new, an openness which was not universally shared; the second is the sense the interviewee had that they may be facing problems where the encouragement of integrative ideology is concerned. These problems (Mariam suggests) originate in a lack of "acceptance". Mariam may believe those in the school bureaucracies understand integration, but they are currently not in favour. Mariam goes on to suggest that pressure had built from those with access to the ministerial bureaucracies, and this in turn created anxiety within those bureaucracies. If this pressure exists, where does it come from and how is it being applied? Where do those applying this pressure look for educational experience? Clearly there is a gap between those applying pressure and the ministries and schools. Mariam appears to be both willing to think about new ideas, while also feeling constrained, perhaps by wider social pressures (Haddidi, 1998).

Current ideologies may be dictated by costs, and fear of costs, as much as a sense of what is right. Perhaps, as with finance ministers, those in bureaucracies with access to budgets may not only express their innate sensibilities by allocating resources, but equally their

perceptions of what *can* be done may create a sense of what *should* be done. If SEN provision is too costly, maybe it is not desirable and prejudices against those with SEN are proven by the "problems" they cause for those organizing provision.

> I think we could have mild mental disabilities and mental disabilities [allocated to] other classrooms but what could be impossible to cater for would be the severe multiple mental [disabilities] because those need a lot of funding, need a lot of assistance technically. (Mariam, interviewed 2001)

The thinking behind provision is thus pragmatic, and any changes will be dictated by principles of available funding rather than principles of best practice. Mariam also illustrates a characteristic vagueness where identifying types of SEN is concerned: the largest categories are mental and physical, and these are then simply sub-divided between "severe" and "mild". The model is pathologized (Kirk, 1975; Fulcher, 1999): disability is still seen by many as a disease, a negative quantity, a problem which then can communicate itself to others by causing problems to those engaged in providing education for "normal" students. (Billington, 2000)

Sara seems to agree with Mariam's pragmatic, fund-based excuse to relegate SEN.

> But in terms of education for special needs, the argument [is going on] and I am not convinced with it at the present time. Is that this kind of specialisations you need? To pour a lot of money to provide basic facilities to train a student compared to other specialisations …? (Sara, interviewed 2001)

Sara has not developed any complex picture of SEN, nor of the way SEN fits into provision generally. She draws parallels with other specializations and SEN remains the

domain of those "familiar with this kind of education" not the responsibility of everyone (Sara, interviewed 2001). It is not difficult to see that an ideological approach like this could lead an individual to foresee problems rather than opportunities in SEN provision. Sara suggests there may be problems "qualify[ing] so many different groups of teachers to fulfil certain special needs within the Ministry of Education" (Sara, interviewed 2001) Only Noora shows a more complex awareness of the issues, a developed responsive ideology, which has within it a clear structure devoted to SEN. For her, at least – and uniquely among those interviewed – there is also an attempt to move away from pathologization.

> We are trying to help in that way for now, but when the centre is ready then we will be able to help them, but I still believe that those children should not be totally institutionalised. They should be there for five days a week and two days a week they should go home. They need to be in a home environment, to feel that they are part of the family and not thrown away. (Noora, interviewed 2001)

But even in this context, Noora's ideology works to build SEN into the pre-existing structure. Current thinking might be following Noora, away from older habits of institutionalisation of those considered educationally different. Noora may be attempting to resurrect older practices of families as providers of care, a practice being broken down in Oman – as elsewhere – by development and industrialization. This shows a perception of those with SEN as rightfully part of society.

4.2.2: Awareness of global trends

Often awareness of changes elsewhere is expressed subtly. For example, Sara says that educational institutions do not differentiate between categories of special need, which

suggests Sara is aware that, elsewhere, such differentiation exists and is somehow important.

> Through my own observation the number of student with special needs, we have a variety of groups. The existing institutions, sometimes they look at them as one category. (Sara, interviewed 2001)

Noora refers to recent visits to the US and SEN projects there.

> It [the ZAP] is going to be a big project and we'll present it to His Majesty himself to fund for the project. But that also is going to be a big breakthrough so that we can set it up in a place where agriculture … there are possibilities, it will prosper and then all the children can go there… . Now we have trained them, we've given them basic skills, learning, discipline, they can read and write a little bit those who can, those who can't we are giving them care, but what's next, what can happen? I have visited many such similar projects in different countries, like in Chicago when I was there five years ago ... I saw that they do like this horticulture? Without thinking and any effort they just take some soil and put in a little pot and it is ready for sale. It is just simple things they can do, once you train them, then it is a repetition of the same procedure, they become so efficient in it (Noora, interviewed 2001)

It is significant that US attitudes to accommodating those with SEN are acceptable in their simplest forms, and also important that, while such projects may find their influence in the West, the method of bringing them into operation remains very Omani in character – funding direct from the head of state. This works at present, but any system of provision for minority groups that have experienced significant prejudice, and still do experience levels of prejudice and misunderstanding, a system that depends on the enlightened beneficence of a single person or class, is a system in danger. Without significant ideological change within the Omani education bureaucracy, it is possible that any advances made over the past 30 years could quickly and easily be undone.

4.2.3: Consideration of future developments with reference to local context

There have been some considerable changes since 1970 in Oman; however, these may be not as revolutionary as sometimes suggested (Haddidi, 1998).

> [The society's and government's approach is a] poor approach. Unless a family has handicapped children, they don't even know what does those of special needs mean. Likewise, mentally retarded, they take it as "mad" or "lunatic", and should go to the Ibn Sina Hospital.[3] Naturally, Ibn Sina Hospital will make things worse for the child. This is society's approach. (Nawal, interviewed 2001)

Uncertainty is demonstrated by the simple act of stigmatization of SEN, and this may be practically illustrated by extreme forms of pathologization such as hospitalization at Ibn Sina. Understanding, overall, is limited and some interviewees evinced a claustrophobic resistance to alternative, non-Omani solutions. Badr, for example, sees developments in other states as somehow illogical, even irrational, and possibly contrary to natural law.

> But if we put all the seats [in a class] there for disabled students, we are also taking the rights of the normal people that they have to go down and they have to do this. (Badr, interviewed 2001)

Badr chooses a reactionary position; he chooses for his example to reject, not an expensive and complex reorganization of facilities, but a simple repositioning of chairs – Badr's position rejects any rights connected to disablement. His rejection of such rights should also be linked to a rejection of those, predominantly Western discourses which

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[3] The Ibn Sina Hospital is a psychiatric institution in Muscat very similar to those in the old system of asylums in the UK. People thought too mentally "disturbed" to be allowed to remain in society at large are confined here. One obvious question may be who is disturbed by whom?

usually support them. There may be interactions here between a wider social ideology, and personal philosophies based on socio-cultural identity.

Certainly this is not notably evinced in Noora's responses, which talk neutrally about widening responsibility. Noora's education outside Oman has created an ideological vulnerability in the sense that she does not demonstrate absolute certainties, but rather identifies general areas where change can or should take place. She is open to possibilities and to different even radical approaches.

> I am slowly opening the field to more support like making everybody realize that it is not only the responsibility of the Ministry, but also the responsibility of society as a whole. (Noora, interviewed 2001)

Clearly it is important for Noora that she encourage self-reliance, a dramatic departure for the people of an oil state, and there is a suggestion that this is a state of affairs Noora would like to develop further.

> We have managed to do a couple of the regions' centres. We have managed to guide them into buying or getting a piece of land and then to build departments and shops in those lands. So that they can have, I mean so they can rent them out and the funds would be ongoing. (Noora, interviewed 2001)

It appears that, overall, developments elsewhere may have had some kind of effect on Oman in terms of a growth in awareness and, thus, a development of strategies of thought regarding those with SEN.

> I think it is happening now, they have a lot more awareness, and people are beginning to collaborate and shall stand by them. That's a very positive thing and very encouraging and when we see the, you know, when we have something for the disabled and a lot of people show up. (Noora, interviewed 2001)

Although is must be acknowledged that Oman is enjoying some important ideological changes, and that many of these will have a beneficial influence on SEN provision, it should also be seen that change is not necessarily something that occurs easily. Sometimes change happens quickly, sometimes more slowly, and sometimes there will be reverses. The important details must lie in how deeply ideological change has penetrated the hierarchies of power. Also much will depend on how vulnerable those resistant bureaucrats are themselves: without accountability and transparency a bureaucracy is open to hidden and frequently retrograde influences. New ideas, even if these might find favour in society as a whole, cannot filter into legislation or even debate; ideology may become ossified and deeply conservative.

4.3: Terminology

Both context and ideology are developed and presented in the terminology used or available for use: the so-called Sapir-Whorf hypothesis suggests that language gives shape to our experience of the world (Penn, 1972: 33) and thus creates ideology and crucial aspects of context simultaneously. Obviously terminology does not create geography, but it does build a geography of the mind and of communication. Whether or not the Sapir-Whorf cognitive model is fully adequate, terminology is nevertheless used both to construct and then negotiate the labyrinth of ideas.

Nowhere are attitudes to SEN more clearly demonstrated, and negative attitude more difficult to hide, than in specific choices of words and phrases. Linguistic choices are generally made freely without much aforethought. While some interviewees may have been reluctant overall to communicate how they felt on certain key issues, nonetheless their consistent use of terms such as "normal" provides an invaluable guide to what is really thought, and where provision stands and may eventually go. There is, interestingly, an amount of terminological confusion which causes frustration and must have a negative effect on provision. When there is this vagueness of thought, provision may be affected negatively: personal and bureaucratic confusion cannot be helpful. We are all prisoners of context and ideology – and this state may well be reflected in the confusion of terminology.

4.3.1: Concepts of normality

Even when talking of something as apparently clear cut as the visible differences between the physically able and the physically disabled or differently able, it is difficult to know where, exactly, the pattern for "normality" lies for any one particular group (Slee, 1998). Maybe it varies from group to group and person to person, depending on variables such as education, media exposure of disablement, personal experience and so on. Although there may be a consensus between psychologists regarding what constitutes abnormal behaviour, even this is socially variable. It may not even be an answerable question since individuals have competing ideologies, and these evolve. Any concept of what is normal may be fixed only for certain conditions and certain people for relatively short periods.

An illustrative response from within the interviews would be the points made by Badr (interviewed 2001), whose concepts of normal and abnormal were clear and traditional, but even Mariam uses the term normal to mean those who are not disabled. If many trainee teachers have a similarly exclusive perception it will prove difficult to create the appropriate ideological environment for training them to adapt their behaviour and classrooms to include those with SEN.

Clearly there remains the distinction of those relegated to Ibn Sina (Nawal, interviewed 2001). Those relegated in such a way are stigmatized by pathologization and by the power of professionals to identify (Clark, Dyson and Milward, 1998), and thus create a taboo around those with any kind of SEN (Hind, interviewed 2001). Whether taboos lead to exclusion or the practice of exclusion builds a taboo is irrelevant: the cycle of stigmatization is difficult to break, especially when reinforced terminologically.

The term "normal" was repeated frequently by respondents in the interviews. Khalifa recognizes the problems of such terminological stigmatization.

> The word handicapped is used more and now [also] the phrase is "individuals of special needs". … [T]he more important thing is to convey your message to the community and do that gradually. People generally don't absorb the words, and therefore not many understand special needs except educated people. "Special needs" is a long and multi-meaning term but if you say to someone "handicapped" he will understand directly. I am of those who don't want to complicate things. (Khalifa, interviewed 2001)

Some people, Khalifa infers, may understand nuances of terminology, but the best use of words is the simplest, however much this may reinforce ideas of normality and deviance. Khalifa may not want to "complicate things", but simplification in the case of SEN leads

directly to gross catagorization and the use of ideologically loaded descriptions. Khalifa wants to appear reasonable, communicative and progressive, but the pragmatism he displays is deeply antipathetic to SEN provision. Sometimes, as with Badr, the comparative references are clear and unambiguous; at other times, referring to normality is couched within ideas which the interviewee may assume are shared by the interviewer and society as a whole.

> But if we put all the seats there, we are also taking the rights of the normal people that they have to go down and they have to do this. (Badr, interviewed 2001)

This sentence is an unambiguous interpretation using the word "normal": it suggests that anyone who is not "able-bodied" is not to be perceived as normal. Rights are dependent on similarity. This interviewee sees the legislative process, whether created by government or university or school, as logically inclusive only of those who are normal; anything which, as in this case, alters the infrastructure in order to cope better with a wider spectrum of difference is seen as "taking the rights of the normal people". Those with SEN are treated as if they have some variety of communicable disease, and disablement is pathologized further (Billington, 2000). It is not hard to see what lies behind this view. First, infrastructure alteration may take resources from those who currently enjoy them. This, in turn, suggests resources are better used by those who are normal, and have enjoyed them in the past. Second, "the rights of normal people" are somehow more valuable, more worthy than the rights of others. It might be considered that such rights are natural, linked to the logical way that laws proceed from human need and psychology (Rawls, 1972). Thus, any adaptation of laws and behaviour to include the disabled, and therefore those with SEN, is "unnatural".

Can a theory of normality be created without also creating contradictions? Normality can refer to the physical: those humans who are made in a way we have come to believe as right. This can mean anything from something as apparently innocuous as the usual amount of body hair to something as invidious as skin colour. It is clear that height is an important consideration of normality in Oman (see chapter 1.3).

> .... In the schools we are not allowed also to admit them in our colleges because of their disability. ... Sometimes even if they [applicants for TTCs] are short they are not allowed in, because the Ministry will not employ them .... So this is part of this admission and registration problems that we are having now with the disabled. (Badr, interviewed 2001)

Here Badr is sympathetic to the plight of shorter people, yet his comments display a logical inconsistency. Might it not be possible to see shortness as just another deviation from a norm which does not exist? There can sometimes be a patronizing aspect to the perception of those with SEN. Mariam is typical, because all groups prefer to cohere around an idea of what is us and therefore normal. One common topic of communication is what makes other people so other: humour relies on our sense of identity to create jokes.

> A lot of them would say that the little kids here are very happy. ... A lot of those kids have been either neglected or even called names, especially the ones who were in schools and in there, there is a sense of belonging, they feel that hey you know it's ok and nobody mistreats them or looks down at them and then we also try to do, when I was in the schools, a lot of integration? We have normal kids or rather kids who are not disabled coming from other schools to have games with them. (Mariam, interviewed 2001)

It seems that here Mariam has to stop herself from equating abnormal with disabled. Is this an equation which is usual for her? It must be remembered that interviewees were aware of researcher interest in and therefore partiality towards those with SEN. For Mariam normality exists in places apart from those institutions "coping" with those who are disabled. When contact occurs it is condescendingly to "have games with them" (Warnock, 1989: 4-5); real academic or training contact is avoided, yet a sense of achievement remains in a token integration which is hardly integration at all. Noora suggests that some students with SEN experienced abnormal brain function.

> Those who have dyslexia, some other mental problems rather have academic problems; it has to do with the way the brain works. It doesn't work the normal way, as it should. They need to be taken care of in a special way so that they can develop normally. There are many other such types of accidents and many other areas. (Noora, interviewed 2001)

"Normality" in any discourse is a word steeped in various justifications. One justification for its use is to bestow rights and equality. Normality might involve being able to read and write and communicate more or less effectively in common codes; normality is also communicating within the parameters accepted by the educated elite. But normality is more difficult to accommodate into the legislative process when moving from visible to less apparent measures: whereas some students look different, others function or act differently displaying subtle differences. The absence of obvious differences may in some circumstances lead to a greater desire to make distinctions clear and known.

> I had a sister, I still have a sister who does have a mild, she is kind of border line IQ. … I was really concerned about that curriculum that would be to suit kids with learning difficulties in the school systems and also to suit kids who have higher level of IQ. (Mariam, interviewed 2001)

One side of a border line Mariam suggests is more "workable" and "milder" than another. But who defines the line, and how? The second part of her extract suggests that lower IQ – however that is measured, and whatever real value it has as a tool for educationalists - entails difficulties while a "higher" level – further from that border line – is a state of super-normality. Even Noora, despite what seem otherwise liberal comments on the integration of SEN students, seems happy with notions of IQ and normality.

> Yes we do [use the term "mentally retarded"] – [in Arabic] "takhaluf agleeyan" … . The level of IQ. If it's below 60 or something. I think that 60 is the starting point for [being] mentally retarded. (Noora, interviewed 2001)

The description "retarded" admits a relationship between the normal and those who are stopped from achieving normality. Once again the artificial IQ measurement is a handy tool for categorization. This is another easy form of rationalization – the psychology of normality - which suggests there must be general concepts of normality.

> Also the centres for normal children where there is vocational training, we have children there, who have not made it in normal schools and go to the centres for vocational training, and they have a chance now to make something out of their lives, but because they have learning difficulties and they have had learning difficulties in school, they cannot learn. (Noora, interviewed 2001)

Here, constructions of normality define who a person is and what they will be able to accomplish. What is assumed is that when a child cannot "make it in normal schools" then it is not the fault of those institutions. Rather, an additional structure is needed to help, something that can operate to accommodate their "deficit" needs. Acceptance of difference is, once more, conditional on separation and leaving mainstream educational systems working more or less as they were before. It may be that before inclusion can

even be considered, philosophies of "normality" need to be thoroughly reassessed. There is a curious attitude to the effect of inclusive practices where they are seen as a method to create "normality".

> Here it's not going to be like that, because we are not able to help the child in the school and they will help him. It will make a lot of difference for the child, because if he feels normal as long as he goes to the normal school, he will challenge his own capacities, abilities, they will get better, because he always sees normality around him, and he will become normal (Noora, interviewed 2001)

Helping means making the abnormal normal, and to be normal is to be "better", rather like recovering from an illness. Also, becoming "normal" is a process of fitting in to a group, and therefore adapting successfully. "Normality" is such a strong, clear concept in this and other interviews that one cannot but wonder what kind of mental picture exists of disablement: there appear to be clear, distinct differences between those who are normal or who can become normal by being helped to fit in, and those who are not, and who never can be helped. The danger may be that those who cannot be helped by such a system will simply be abandoned.

4.3.2: Conceptualising disability through terminology

One word which occurred frequently in the initial interviews was "problem": typically, a disability was a problem, and a problem is usually perceived as belonging to the person with the difference rather than those who surround that person, or those institutions that should cater for their needs. Since all students at some points in their careers present problems which need solutions (Warnock, 1978), this suggests that it is not that bureaucracies or institutions are averse to solving problems, but rather that they would rather solve problems already catered for in their own ideological frames.

Meaning he is having a learning difficulty and the teacher can't reach the child and he is not achieving the goals, then you have a problem. I think in our context it's that. But they also tend to, I have seen this recently, also kids who have mild, like some hearing problems, are also considered as having learning difficulties in Oman. (Mariam, interviewed 2001)

The language of disability is characterized by the use of the word "problem" – even though sometimes used carelessly, it still suggests an attitude. Superficially this suggests that the interviewee sympathetically considers the problems faced by the disabled. However, in an alternative reading it is the educator and the relevant authorities who face problems in having to deal with the disabled. Quite often the respondents suggested the whole issue of SEN was a "burden" for administrators: "problems" are created by disablement, rather than by an environment that does little or nothing to accommodate difference. "Problems" range from "mild" to "severe" – used similarly for all disablement, and for IQ.

We start with the gifted and go to the mental disabilities. There are three levels or three areas. We have the severe, we have the moderate who is educable[4], then we have the mild, we have all those three levels. We have the physical disabilities, besides the mental disabilities, the blind, deaf and the mute. Then we have the physical disabilities, which is the result of accidents, genetic or other causes and some of them diseases. … There are many other such types of accidents and many other areas. (Noora, interviewed 2001)

Once again, those who are mildly disabled present fewer problems.

But in a way we have to distinguish between the severely handicapped and between those who have fewer problems. (Badr, interviewed 2001)

[4]Another binary is at work - educable / ineducable. This was a 'category' in the *Handicapped Register* in the UK in the 1940s.

The definition of SEN follows a range from mild to severe, and this range also maps an increasing burden of problems "caused" by the disabled. In the case of Nawal there is a strong sense of relief that severity was rare.

> Yes, thank God the severe cases are not much and most of the cases are the average which some brand as "learning difficulties" not considered mentally retarded or blind or handicapped. These latter cases are few in Oman. (Nawal, interviewed 2001)

This approach to provision for students with SEN has practical, classroom outcomes. If the student always has the problems, the educator must deal with these, be thankful that severity is rare or, at extremes, admit that the problems presented are too great or too complex. Often the word "problem" is a synonym for "difficulties".

> Students or children with mild mental disability, some of them had learning difficulties (Mariam, interviewed 2001)
>
> A lot of the kids there you have 5 kids from the same family, brothers and sisters all of them having some sort of learning difficulties or mild mental or you know there would be, one of them would be brighter than the other but then all of them had the same problem (Mariam, interviewed 2001)

The student *owns* the difficulties and the problems are therefore, in some way, their fault: those with SEN are thus referred to as "having learning difficulties". Mariam's use of "brighter" is as important as it is in English, implying a range from bright to dull, and though both extremes might be included in the interviewee's estimation of SEN (Khaleela, interviewed 2001), a spectrum such as this is not conducive to inclusion. This range of categorization implies imprecise thought, and ends with the use of crude categories such as "mental retardation cases" (Nawal, interviewed 2001).

It was interesting to note that, while interviewees seemed happy to converse in English the majority of the time, when it came to specific terms defining disability, Arabic seemed more appropriate. This is because the lexicon of disability is not generated in universities or across the media but in the home, and these familiar colloquial words are not frequently translated. There might be other reasons. Interviewees, who understand certain terms in Arabic very well, may struggle to understand English equivalences. It is also possible that interviewees could be embarrassed that their usages were either not correct or were sometimes ideologically suspect in English, and therefore preferred what they saw as more neutral terms they knew well.

> Some people will say /takhaluf 'aglee/ ("mentally retarded") it's really – yes, they don't use it any more [in the west]. I personally, I know that you have to use the word disabled – the word handicapped is so heavy on the tongue and heart, so, okay, disabled. In Arabic they still use the word /mu'aq/ ("handicapped") a lot but now they are trying to emphasize the use of /thawee alihtiyajat alkhasah/ ("special needs"). (Mariam, interviewed 2001)

In Oman there is currently no evidence for significant linguistic shifts, and words used to describe disablement are those same words in use for generations. Finally, interviewees evinced varying degrees of terminological and thus general confusion.

> In the general schools we have the blind for example … I think the blind are not like the deaf or mentally retarded, the blind are normal children who can get along with others and graduate from college. (Nawal, interviewed 2001)

The kind of thought process that considers deafness linked to mental impairment while blindness should be categorized as normal might be difficult to unravel. Nawal here indicates a milder stigmatization of blindness than is common in Oman.

4.3.3: Integration and inclusion – "demj"

Ideas such as normality and acceptability have direct relevance for notions such as integration and inclusion, and it is clear that there is a large gap between a willingness to use such terms and a willingness to understand their implications.

> I would prefer to use the word integration especially in terms of treating learning difficulties. When we are asked about our integration experience in Oman we say that it contains students … who are suffering from learning difficulties and that we are required to find programmes to handle and help these students. We can also deal with children with minor mental retardation or auditory retardation and therefore integrate them in the community so that their minor retardation should not be an obstacle that causes delay in their study or to make them fail in their education. (Khalifa, interviewed 2001)

The implication of integration may be that education is a resource which should be open to all, and that disablement ought to be no block to use of that resource. Nawal presents integration as something completely different: a method to "handle" or "deal with" certain categories of student. There may be a desire to widen access, and this could mean an increase social integration, but this is not the same as integration.

> The problem here is so sensitive as some people would say that integration means getting the disabled into the schools and this would affect the [other] students and the general atmosphere and affect the teacher as well. … [T]o any normal person … integrating the disabled students in the general education schools is what we mean by integration, which means that we should provide curricula, the proper situation and teachers. (Khalifa, interviewed 2001)

Khalifa seems to be avoiding any wider implications of integration – that it might mean a carpet policy for "getting the disabled into the schools". This is something he cannot countenance: the implications are too many and too complex. But Khalifa does seem to understand the inevitable implications; Mariam sees resistance as merely systemic.

> The other thing – I was trying very hard and I think we are doing now – is this whole issue of integration. I sent in a couple of recommendations when I was in the school, telling them that a lot of kids can be integrated, but I did realize it is not so easy, because we don't want to integrate if the school systems are not ready to accept it. (Mariam, interviewed 2001)

There seems to be a ready acceptance among some of the interviewees – though not Noora – that the system, possibly even the culture is not ready for levels of integration. In the interviewees' minds, there was no clear distinction between integration and inclusion but confusion as to what the concepts mean – in theory or practice.

> I think in Oman, because there's a lot of discussion now, it's a new trial for us, a new concept – and I know even in other GCC countries there is inclusion [/demj/] but they also have what they call a sort of partial integration [/demj juzee/]. When you talk about integration and when you talk about this whole movement of mainstreaming [/tawheed almasar/] and all this, it's all the same, and new to us. (Mariam, interviewed 2001)

For Noora there was a more positive identification of the concept of "integration".

> We are working now getting the Ministry of Education to talk about the different needs of those children, what needs to be done in the schools, so that they can be integrated or included, how can it be made comfortable to learn and how can they be handled, what needs to happen in the classroom and school. (Noora, interviewed 2001)

It seems that for Noora, integration and inclusion means ease of handling, even containment rather than anything more political or thorough-going.

The particular defining role of terminology in defining SEN and then provision of appropriate teaching and facilities is a part of the micro-context of SENs in Oman.

Linguistic factors are no less important – and may be more so – because of the exchange between English and Arabic.

> It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the "real world" is to a large extent unconsciously built upon the language habits of the group. (Sapir, 1958: 69)

To be sensitive to the context of and ideologies surrounding SEN and teacher training and SEN and its provision means, therefore, to be especially sensitive to the role terminology plays in sustaining or challenging ideas.

4.4: Policy

The context of policy is one which necessarily plays a determining role in educational provision. From the widest conceptualization of a government's manifesto all the way down to the specifics of policies fine-tuned to particular arenas such as education or SEN, policy is the aqueduct allowing power to be exercised and negotiated. In Oman, as elsewhere, education policy has to reflect a consensus *and* adapt where appropriate. Putative changes in policies of education provision will always be contested, perhaps more so in a society unused to discussion or a multiplicity of forums. SEN may be considered vital – and therefore in need of policies devoted to it – or as a side issue – in which case changes need only plug in to existing structures.

Policy-making is not an easy topic to bring up in interviews in a society not used to political discussion (see chapter 7). Despite such difficulties, Mariam offers some limited reaction to the policies that currently exist.

> We don't have a lot of Omanis qualified in special needs and I know there has been some effort through the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education to provide scholarships – when they get the proper scholarship programmes to say hey, let's give a scholarship to special needs also. (Mariam, interviewed 2001)

This suggests that, to Miriam at least, SEN provision is as easy as adding a swimming pool or building a gym. However, her response is ambivalent – she may see Ministerial activity regarding SEN as haphazard rather than planned, or she may feel that significant planning simply is not vital. Whichever, SEN is dealt with as an afterthought, rather than as a significant part of education policy or as a logical outcome of overall policy. Forging academic links may represent an alternative to policy, a soft policy option because occurring outside the aegis of government. Such links are important for Sara and more satisfactory in terms of immediate results.

> Whether universities are associated with other universities, this is really very important and useful, for the institution itself or for its graduates. Even the graduates, if the university has a good reputation, well established academically and it's internationally accepted and approved. (Sara, interviewed 2001)

Sara sees policy-making in terms of academic contacts and, secondly, addressing the apparent deficit in teachers, and finally improving the quality of research. Khalifa (interviewed 2001) goes one step further or higher, and sees intergovernmental participation as important in deepening skills. But despite the variety of perceptions of

what SEN policy may be and how it could work, it is clear from all respondents that education policy-making in the future is expected to be very similar in hierarchical structure to the present with the head of state providing both the initiative and the funds. This is strongly reflected by Noora.

> Another part maybe because the government, His Majesty actually, had reached a point where he wanted to see women in policy-making positions. The time had come that he wanted to involve and give them their role. (Noora, interviewed 2001)

Noora is happy that sometimes the current hierarchical workings may be to her and other women's advantages: criticism is absent. Simple plug-in solutions usefully do not challenge extant ideologies. Badr's attitude of positive decentralization (Badr, interviewed 2001) suggests the usefulness or otherwise of education policy lies in its cheapness.

Decisions about which aspect of education policy has priority are crucial: should SEN have a policy identity, and if so how large an identity? Policy may begin by establishing the academic credentials of SEN itself.

> So from day one when I reached the Ministry, the first thing that I have made it clear to them and I [have] been repeating this message to them over and over and I know now all my colleagues know as a fact that I do not believe in making decisions [on SEN], imposing it on them but we all need to discuss, all of them have to come to a decision together. I am operating in a lot of committees (Noora, interviewed 2001)

Here the context of SEN policy is academic and low-level but balanced by Noora's evangelizing energy. But does the operation of committees in the field of SEN provision

in Oman offset the lack of policy input, or correct the top-down system of imposed solutions? It may be that when something *looks* as if it is being done, this is easier, cheaper and less problematic than *actually* putting a policy into operation. Nothing stalls the need to act better than exaggerating the need to talk about the need to act.

SEN policy appeared to be difficult to identify: needs were clear, problems of provision acknowledged, but whether or not the policy aqueduct exists to obviate these problems and supply these needs was unclear.

> We have [students] who don't have a chance. Look at those who are going to Jordan [for] special education at their own expense. … There should be a system, rules and follow-ups and we in the department don't have the potential to do so. Technical support is one of the most important aspects in special education. (Khalifa, interviewed 2001)

Khalifa's implicit suggestion is that SEN policy cannot be *ad hoc*, and that some kind of change is needed – if only to salve national pride in that people with SEN are not forced to go to Jordan. To others, SEN policy means containment, and projections for future provision seem to mean designing a curriculum where "some hours [can be saved] for the special needs course".

> We need our students at least to have some knowledge about how to deal with this kind of students. So far we don't have that, and I think we need to consider that in our new design of the curriculum. We are going now to reduce the hours from here and to increase it in the specialization then we ought to think of saving some hours for the special needs course. (Badr, interviewed 2001)

With SEN as a policy afterthought, priorities continue to be dictated by generalized needs. When SEN is considered – perhaps expressed in the need to buy SEN-related materials – its value as policy is measured against costs.

> Some of them are still using the old reference books and it takes time you know to get them also to be convinced to use the new ones. The shortcomings still I feel that there are some areas of centralization and we need to balance the accounts of these colleges. We need them also to buy their own materials and references and books in the future. (Badr, interviewed 2001)

Although he criticizes the centralization of the Ministry, it is only to suggest that central funds can be relieved of the burden of providing colleges with the necessary tools. As for future courses then these, too, can be tacked on rather than be part of any grander redesign. Education policy in Oman prefers a problem-free environment; SEN policy exists in the context of the curricular needs of the majority.

> [This future] depends on what is taught in the other courses. If we have a problem for specialization, now if we look at SEN as a general course then it will part of the components of that general course and I don't think they will be able to have more than one or two courses at most. (Badr, interviewed 2001)

Even in the future, SEN is still identified with problems; coping with them should require the minimum effort and resource allocation necessary. The needs of the majority outweigh those of any minority – particularly if meeting those new needs means adapting the system more widely. The short history of Omani pedagogy, and the increasing importance of budgetary constraints and fiscal prudence, may explain a preference for a model of this kind. The tone – ideologically, contextually and therefore in education policy – is one of stasis and not experiment. For Badr, the future of relevant teacher

training rests in the recruitment of more administrators like himself. "We need also to think of … training administrators in special needs" (Badr, interviewed 2001). Thus the future is like the present, only more so. This preference for practiced, standardized methods is also true of the way SEN should be assessed through testing.

> The existing institutions, sometimes they look at them as one category. I think at the present time SQU should think, and particularly the College of Education, how to develop current standardized tests that can be used by different educational institutions to measure and assess the ability of the student. If only we were successful from the beginning in developing such standardized tests, adapted to the Omani environment. (Sara, interviewed 2001)

In the context of a preference for standardization as a place of pedagogic safety – not unknown in Western states – a policy of one-size-fits-all is reassuring. Noora sees future possibilities coming as a result of the pressure of ordinary people, the only time those with SEN or their representatives are mentioned in terms of making a contribution. The most important pressure group would be made up of parents, mirroring similar change in the UK (Dillon and Maguire, 2001).

> Now the Omani Disabled Society comes to me and says we need a law for the disabled. I would say to them yes there is something that is being worked on and they keep pushing. (Noora, interviewed 2001)

Neither integration nor inclusion are considered part of the future of SEN provision by Mariam – not because they are inappropriate *per se*, but rather because Omani society is not ready for such a change.

> The other thing that I was trying very hard and I think we are doing now is this whole issue of integration. I sent in a couple of recommendations when I was in the school, telling them that a lot of kids can be integrated, but I did realize it is not so easy, because we don't want to integrate if the school systems are not ready to accept [them]. (Mariam, interviewed 2001)

Mariam's prediction of lack of acceptance may recognize the current situation and perspectives of Omani society and the resistance to change of the Omani education bureaucracy and teaching body. Mariam's basic fear is that the support needed for integration is unavailable. "Do we know the teachers are ready? Do we have the technical assistance we need?" (Mariam, interviewed 2001) Mariam feels the future is limited by pragmatism not ideology.

Noora's attitude stands out as more assertive and positive. She has a different, personal relationship with the bureaucracy in which she works – perhaps her identity as an educated Omani woman with a well-known place in education provision confers a certain freedom and imagination. She may be more of an assertively unique personality; those who are less assertive are more likely to be swamped by the political consensus. Listening to her, one might not imagine the kind of problems suggested by Badr or Mariam exist.

> We [those with an interest in SEN provision within the bureaucracy] are working now to get the Ministry of Education to talk about the different needs of those [SEN] children, what needs to be done in the schools, so that they can be integrated, can be comfortable to learn and how can they be helped, what needs to happen in the classroom and school. (Noora, interviewed 2001)

If Noora thinks outside the consensus, this could be the origin of her optimism. The future is seen in terms of what can be done; and the picture of needs is an inclusive one. Contextually she is not limited but, paradoxically, feels freer to make radical suggestions. From what can be read in Noora's responses, integration is something which can be achieved. This optimism can sometimes be observed in general terms, as with Noora, and sometimes only in specifics: the future of SEN provision is seen by Mariam based within an expansion of teacher training and IST.

> I think we need to have Omanis specialized in the field. We need to send Omanis out – Dr K will tell you more about this, they are planning to do this – Omani teachers to go out and sort of get high diplomas in learning difficulties to be trained in assessment and the project of assessment. If we don't get that, I don't think we can expand. (Mariam, interviewed 2001)

Noora's optimism suggests that the ways civil servants relate to SEN are not as fixed nor as conservative as might be thought. Mariam is also optimistically pragmatic. Khalifa's optimism is different, and has an initial self-congratulatory dimension to be expected from a civil servant doing a job for which he may not be rewarded or thanked sufficiently, balanced by his awareness of policy limitations.

> I don't like to praise or commend myself [but] I feel that we have gone a long way, put in real efforts and achieved something. But realistically, what has so far been done does not come up to our aspirations at all. We could have done more as far as special education is concerned. … [W]e should have more resources and many things are in the hands of our superiors. … If we look at our position in Oman and what is happening in the Gulf States, we find that we are trailing them by a long way. (Khalifa, interviewed 2001)

Mariam's pragmatism could also be construed as pessimism, a not unusual attitude for those working for or within bureaucracies. This may not only be personal negativity, but also Mariam's awareness of the need for the provision of key personnel. This awareness of a need not met, generates a fatalistic and lugubrious response in contrast to Noora's assertiveness.

> In future things are happening – the legislation for disability is also now in the pipeline, we hope in time it will be ready and that will give them certain rights and they can claim certain things we have to do for them. (Noora, interviewed 2001)

Noora's experiences abroad have given her a different attitude and have influenced her opinions in favour of substantial change within the area of SEN and the structuring of teacher training. There is a sense, not articulated clearly, of a need for change balanced by her recognition that such change is unlikely or unlikely to be swift.

> We are trying to help in that way for now, but when the centre is ready then we will be able to help them, but I still believe that those children should not be totally institutionalized. (Noora, interviewed 2001)

There is a residual belief in the need for institutionalization and even a suggestion that all SEN students need *some* level of institutional (perhaps psychiatric) care. Noora sees Omani society with a rather rosy hue, saying "we are moving on" without offering much substantial evidence of this amelioration, except for small-scale operations.

> If they been trained from Al Khoud centre and have some skills, we are trying to help them by providing them funds so that they can set up a little workshop, a little business. We have a project with funds coming from the government every year for

> that, and so we try to make them independent and give them some funds so that they can set up small businesses. (Noora, interviewed 2001)

Her faith in these projects may seem positive and encouraging, but there seems little to suggest that what she "look[s] forward to … in the coming years" (Noora, interviewed 2001) depends more on the success or otherwise of small-scale projects rather than any real policy changes.

> That is the area I think needs a lot of work in, both the Ministry and the higher education institutions … . As far as the Ministry is concerned, I think we need to involve them in a lot more things with more programmes and projects for them where we can. (Noora, interviewed 2001)

Noora may simply be dealing pragmatically with her position within a bureaucracy. Doing things "where we can" could be the most effective way to meet short and medium-term SEN in Oman, though it could also be that Noora demonstrates a naïveté where change and SEN provision is concerned.

> Those kids will not be kicked out and told they are not fit. He is not learning, he is mentally retarded and they will send him to a special school – that is wrong. Here it's not going to be like that, because we will be able to help the child in the school and they will help him. It will make a lot of difference for the child, because if he feels normal as long as he goes to the normal school, he will challenge his own capacities, abilities, they will get better, because he always sees normality around him, and he will be normal. (Noora, interviewed 2001)

The context of SEN and teacher training should not be contracted into simple policy projections such as this, however optimistic the projected policies may seem. The danger with Noora's comments lies in optimism that may fail to appreciate the complexities of the problem, or more importantly the depth of the changes necessary before SEN

provision can begin to be adequate. Energy does not deliver subtlety – as can be appreciated in her use of the word "normal" – but shows an ideological engagement absent in Saajda's expression of confusion, vagueness and hopelessness. She responded in interview as if waiting to be prompted rather than offering any personal attitudes.

> "I think there is a course or two … but I don't know in which, really of special needs, but I don't know if we cater for the real, real ones who need special needs." (Saajda, interviewed 2001)

She is an example of a bureaucrat whose assessments are vague. Unable to offer any idea of where teacher training and SEN provision intersect, her confusion may be symptomatic of something wider. It is certainly similar to other responses in this data set. Change is stalled by personnel such as these – yet they also dominate the context of provision, dictate the agenda and to a certain extent adapt and then deliver the policy.

Policy is thus far from being a monolithic process in education provision and teacher training. It is discussed in vague terms by all the interviewees, and although some may be positive about change, the majority has no clear vision of how SEN provision will develop. Where SEN discourse does exist in some form it is constrained by pessimism, lack of vision and even by terminology which reflects unhelpful binaries ("normal"/ "abnormal").

4.5: Expertise and policy-makers

The policy of Omanization seems a sensible proposition, but if courses at SQU do not cover those areas of expertise currently filled by expatriates, it will remain a project with

little hope of success. Even Badr recognizes the need to increase the expertise of those involved in teacher training.

> We need to improve the skills of some faculty members. They are unfamiliar still with internet and IT skills and sometimes they are not only reluctant but also resisting change. Some of them are still using the old reference books and it takes time you know to convince them to use the new ones. The short-comings? I feel there needs centralization. … (Badr, interviewed 2001)

Difficulties seem clear to Badr, who recognizes the resistance to change by many involved in teacher training, yet his solution is "centralization". Badr may be the kind of bureaucrat who finds security through power and its familiar conduits, and delegation from above would concentrate education policy-making in his hands. Without some kind of philosophical framework – why changes are needed, how they would interact with Omani culture, what the political effects may be – Badr's recognition of "shortcomings" might well lead to those shortcomings merely being shifted rather than overcome. Badr believes that conservatism among school principals is due to lack of resources and poor communication from above. This shows a certain amount of empathy on the part of Badr, but his reliance on delegating SEN to the Psychology Department – a resource for students who are "problems" – may indicate his position (Badr, interviewed 2001): he would rather pass the problem down the line (Cornulti, 1998; Hegarty, 1998). Delegation becomes a way of avoiding the need for change.

Mariam has a very different attitude, and sees her role as less a figure in authority and more as someone who has the opportunity to learn from others.

> Now I feel that I can have an input and express my opinion in as far as the curriculum is concerned as far as the pilot project that's been done as part of … for learning integration. I am a member of the team, so I feel that I am still working. (Mariam, interviewed 2001)

Building up expertise means creating a sharing structure: teamwork implies learning and change. The system is still, Mariam feels, antagonistic to this approach. She sees consultation as crucial (Mariam, interviewed 2001) and responsibility as the way to unlock innate skills. Without such involvement, she suggests, learning from others is unlikely. Noora is positive about the need to use the expertise of those working in research.

> Now as a policy maker it's different. I want research to come to me, because that's what is going to help me, to make the right decisions, scientific decisions, educative decisions based on research finding scientifically done and I can choose recommendations that work, but based on research, so that you can do follow-on research. I could do justice to [such] research. (Noora: interviewed 2001)

She considers her role to be a hub connecting various research resources – people and departments – and thus her role is itself one of a learner involved in horizontal consultative processes. This is very different from Badr's hierarchically structured, power-accumulating approach.

> Now the Omani Disabled Society comes to me and says we need a law for the disabled. I say, yes there is something that is being worked on, and they keep pushing. We need that law to be done, that's what we need – somebody who is going to tell us what we are missing, somebody who is going to remind us of those things that are needed, because they are the ones who know what they need. So we are communicating with them, they are often in my office when they have any project or any need, they come to me and discuss with me and I support whatever they want to do. (Noora, interviewed 2001)

Noora represents the newest, and in Omani terms, rarest aspect of ministerial thinking - a consultative approach that recognizes the need to learn from those already working in SEN. There may be a problem connecting other members of the bureaucracy, especially those actively making decisions, with the idea of SEN. Unless and until a significant presence of those who are disabled, or who live with disablement is recognized by policy makers, it may be that little change will take place and older methods of delegation will continue.

That education policy-making is still very much a top-down process is clear from many of the interviewees, and questioned by few. "The entire matter will be referred to His Excellency the Undersecretary" (Nawal, interviewed 2001) is not an unusual admission here or in the core interviews. "The academic council is chaired by His Excellency the Undersecretary and Director of the Colleges" (Badr, interviewed 2001). There is plainly not only a hierarchical structure but deference is paid to seniority. What effect does such deference have on the processes of communication and decision-making? There is implicit criticism of hierarchical dislocation by many interviewees, and sometimes such criticism manifests itself as frustration and even anger; Khalifa is typical.

> [L]et us talk about the matter loudly, we are fed up with all the Ministry meetings and recommendations which only go for filing. … We should meet and talk openly. (Khalifa, interviewed 2001)

Noora's approach (Noora, interviewed 2001), which is to encourage education policy-making in the environment of consultation, demonstrates an unusual egalitarian ideology. This could be positive for SEN provision: an approach that involves parents and carers

rather than simply passes down decisions. Some tinkering with the hierarchy in the sense that departmental changes are considered that may have an effect on decision-making, but the basic level of consultation is seen as important even by Badr (interviewed 2001), though he perceives consultation involving only elite layers of the hierarchy rather than a more thoroughgoing arrangement. Nawal, uniquely, appears content with the communication that the bureaucracy enjoys.

> Coordination is always in place. It is clear in every decision taken. It is common that the director calls everyone to discuss various matters and exchange views. Sometimes we seek the opinions of our schools. … [W]e can discuss the matter on the phone, or even visit schools and try to reach a common approach in order to be satisfied about every decision. (Nawal, interviewed 2001)

The truth may lie between the extremes of perceptions of different interviewees, or it may be that some interviewees are easily satisfied with the mechanics of communication rather than the realities of policy change and implementation. Mariam sees teamwork at the key to influencing policy-making positively; she sees the system in place currently as part of a policy system which slows or stops change.

> I sent in a couple of recommendations when I was in the school, telling them that a lot of kids can be integrated, but I did realize policy is not so easy, because we don't want to integrate if the school systems is not ready to accept. (Mariam, interviewed 2001)

When Mariam discusses her consultative approach there can be no doubt that it runs contrary to the traditional top-down male-orientated approach, more generally the rule. In the short and medium term in Oman, and indeed within the Gulf states generally, this

consultative approach may meet resistance from those who prefer the traditional policy control by male hierarchies.

> Here when I moved to the ministry, it was a little bit different. I think that the people at ministry, at least here the feeling I got when I came in, the men were used to a one man's decision. The people who followed me, who were before me were all men. Usually men don't tend to … sort of…. maybe they just feel that [consulting] is a sign of weakness. I don't feel that way. I feel that you can lose out a lot if you don't ask or consult the people around you (Mariam, interviewed 2001)

There is something quietly revolutionary about Mariam's approach, and quite contrary to the conservatism of Badr. Consultation by its nature implies a willingness to change, unless it implies huge cynicism – of which there is no evidence here. Implicitly Mariam suggests that the older policy-making process did "lose out a lot" because it did not consult. Involvement in policy is key to her philosophy, and lack of it what she implies is wrong the system.

Noora implicitly suggests that responsibility is still too hierarchical, and that power is too concentrated. This is particularly important for SEN provision since it denies access to groups that can express the disempowerment many disabled people feel. Although the powerful are probably as likely to encounter SEN as the powerless, such encounters will probably be with one-off cases, members of close family and friends. These cases can be "managed" by using their considerable personal resources, perhaps even by sending individual students abroad. It takes vision to imagine what problems may be faced by those without such resources. Hierarchies tend to become disconnected from realities on the ground. In the UK pressure groups, researchers and NGOs, politics in general, the

media and the health service itself can help reconnect policy makers with those in need and with human rights issues. In Oman much of this connective infrastructure does not exist. Noora's vision is wider and more inclusive than most in Omani bureaucracies.

> The last meeting we covered many of the issues that were damaging the field of disability, we had a lot of participation from ordinary people – we had a three-hour meeting. A lot of participation and lot of responsibility was given to different members of the committee and I hope now with this kind of power that is given, that we are going to be able to have a lot more participation, more awareness, more responsibility offered by different sectors of the government. (Noora, interviewed 2001)

Noora is suggesting that "different sectors of the government" currently avoid delegating responsibility, preferring to keep power, and that this shortcoming might be remedied by greater awareness and participation. But it is clear from Noora's other comments that, while she may have this ideal in mind, the day-to-day reality of her post within the education bureaucracy is very different.

> After [professionals] have decided and they have debated then it comes to me. Then I study it of course and then I sit with them and we go through it and I tell them what I think of it and what I think should be changed. I have my own input and a lot of time I put in a very little input, because they are the experts, they are the ones who are qualified in this field and they know what they are doing and after discussions which is the decision, we prepare a document and that goes to His Excellency for a final approval (Noora, interviewed 2001)

Everything depends on "His Excellency"; one cannot but wonder what will happen to such a document, and what the final policy decisions of such a person are like. Input is fine, but if, in the end all this horizontality has to rely upon the good graces of a single

male whose attitudes may be completely different, the process of consultation is mere window-dressing.

It is important, even to Badr, to involve higher education in the design of his teacher training programmes (Badr, interviewed 2001). This is a logical step for a department already closely allied to SQU, but it may not be so logical for other departments and administrators. Again, there is a problem of connectivity: in this case lateral rather than horizontal. Sara (interviewed 2001) says that such research developments are supported by the highest echelons of government, while Noora (interviewed 2001) is, in general, very positive about using those with specialized research experience. This attitude reflects the perspective of someone who has themselves done academic research, and who is thus open to the research experience of others.

SEN provision is particularly dependent on links to research, but how long will it take to develop and encourage links (Haddidi, 1998)? Saajda is aware of the absence of research.

> We don't have enough facilities for our research, so even if we manage to bring in good teachers … after a year or two … we lose them. (Saajda, interviewed 2001)

The implications for SEN of this may be more serious than is admitted. Noora suggests that experience of research developments will create more openness to new ideas and better policy.

> I want to see that change is produced. I want to be able to use it, put it into real use, so that we can make a difference in what is going on. I realize that there is so much

> to be done in the work that I am doing, and a lot of need for a lot of research. So any researcher like yourself and others whom I hope I will be able to convince others to enter [education research] and work in it. Then I will be able to use or together will be able to make their research findings workable, applicable and real in a real environment. (Noora, interviewed 2001)

Research and specialized experience of all kinds is thus not an addition for Noora but the core of policy; she recognizes the current pace of change, and the need to keep pace with it by deepening the research base. She is the only interviewee who saw a clear and pragmatic link between research and "a real environment". It may be difficult for some to make this link: academic work – especially in theories of education or health provision – sometimes seems divorced from the real world of educational provision.

Mariam recognizes the importance of using the experience of those with specialized knowledge in SEN – this seems to be the second most important resource after consultation more generally with those working in schools and within the hierarchy.

> We've also come to the point where we can depend on early diagnosis. A lot of these kids, especially the ones that I was talking about who came from the government schools, a lot of them were not diagnosed, but the teachers didn't even see the signs that were there. So if you have someone who has his background in special needs, they can see the signs, and maybe they won't be able to assess but they can at least refer to those who assess. (Mariam, interviewed 2001)

The role of those with a "background in special needs" is, in Mariam's system, limited to those occasions when interpreting "the signs" may be necessary. This is not an integrated approach must less an inclusive one, and smacks of a pathologized attitude to SEN (Barton, 1987). Specialized experience is thus something added to real teaching work and likely to effect policy-makers and teachers only superficially.

> This is where the remedial work is being done so they really understand what they can be capable of. So teachers who are somehow involved as special education teachers you can have somebody who wants to do a higher diploma in special needs. I think people like that are needed; we need their remedial teaching methods so that teachers know how to do remedial work. To improve [policy] options. So that would be another option. (Mariam, interviewed 2001)

Mariam's comment is telling: this use of those with specialized skills including research experience right down to basic SEN training is only one option in the process of deepening policy-making and practice. Noora sees the use of expertise, especially expertise which has research capacity behind it, as important as the more obvious resource of funds. In fact for Noora, expertise is the priority.

> The first challenge is expertise, we need to create that calibre of expertise. We need a lot more research in that area for special needs, and we need funds. (Noora: interviewed 2001)

Perhaps she believes that widening the numbers involved in research will lead to a greater horizontality and thus a breakdown of older, impermeable policy-making groups.

When it comes down to the implementation of any policy, the roles played by those with specific skills, influence and power are crucial to success. Expertise needs to be acquired either from others or by direct experience – it does not develop in a vacuum, but is affected by the way policy is debated and implemented. Hierarchy has an impact on the *way* policy develops, and the *kind* of policy that is developed. One of the most important ingredients to the deepening of expertise lies in the research capabilities and resources of a society and its willingness to use these resources. Omanization as a project may well be

a logical expression of social need, but it does not follow that there is as yet a willingness, in the rising professional classes, to express the kind of vocational commitment and determination that so enthuses Noora.

4.6: Conclusion

The analyses of this chapter are crucial in the process of orientating the pattern and focus of research: suggesting those areas such as policy and conceptualization which will allow the most generative use of the key data set. Contextually the chapter frames the work as well as priming the canvass on which later analyses will be developed.

This chapter concentrates on the coding and analysis of eight interviews. Six of those interviewed are quite similar, and even Badr is not so very different to his co-interviewees. All are members of hierarchies and each has enjoyed a university education; all have a certain amount of experience outside Oman; all are dependent on and partially identified with the current political system. Nevertheless they did provide a variety of responses from which important concepts, ideologies and the discourses that determine them were teased out, especially their understanding of SEN, and how they view SEN provision within the overall educational picture.

The chapter works to integrate SEN literature with the reality of SEN and teacher education on the ground in Oman, and lays the foundation for the quantitative analysis in chapter 5, where the three special schools are examined. Chapter 5 will add statistical

sinew to the bones of these initial interviews, providing a more detailed and descriptive account that will also contribute to the foundation for further analysis in the thesis.

These eight interviews with key members of the education hierarchy have opened the first window on SEN and teacher education provision in Oman, and provide the context for the following chapters. More generally, this initial data set illustrates the variety and richness of ideas as well as the constraints of bureaucracy and the limitations of personal attitudes. Ideology, terminology and policy are shown as part of the background to SEN provision; the next chapters will develop these concepts further.

CHAPTER 5: THE QUESTIONNAIRES AND OBSERVATIONS AT THREE SPECIAL SCHOOLS – MARCH 2003

The purpose of this chapter is to contextualize SEN provision in Oman. To offer a strong conceptualization of the field of enquiry of this thesis: this chapter will guide the reader towards understanding current policy and provision for special education in Oman. Following the analyses of the eight-strong data set in chapter 4, the aim here is to add statistical detail. Although this chapter only examines the three special schools that currently (2005) operate in the Sultanate, this nonetheless offers data from the heart of SEN teaching rather than from peripheries such as the education bureaucracy or teacher training. The data deployed here was collected through questionnaires distributed to teachers at the schools (see Appendix A) and school-based observations made by the researcher herself. Initially detailed questions were designed, but then a simpler format was prepared to gain a clearer, less cluttered perspective. From this it was possible to begin to gage what or who influences decisions, what the current concerns of SEN teachers might be, their difficulties and professional needs, and their level of professional contentment. The questionnaires, together with the researcher's observations, produce a fuller idea of the research context, and establish a picture of SEN provision at these schools, and throughout the Sultanate. This chapter provides a snapshot; an idea of the ideological and practical considerations facing SEN provision. It also helps locate SEN provision within Omani educational discourse.

5.1: The process of data collection

Asking the respondents to evaluate the questions would have been useful in highlighting any difficulties they might have faced understanding or replying. However, this was not

possible, and some of the respondents may have been discouraged from replying at all by this further intrusion. It should be remembered that, with a significant majority of respondents not being Omani, there could be an unusually high incidence of diffidence in responding to the questionnaires to be overcome.

There was little choice in the distribution of the questionnaires: even now (2005) there are only three designated special schools: the Al Amal School for the Deaf; the Tarbiyeh al Fekriyeh School for the Mentally Retarded and the Omar bin Alkhatab School for the Blind (see chapter 1.4): all are in the Muscat governorate. The distribution and collection of the questionnaires took place during March, 2003. Despite the fact that the schools are all within 40 km of the capital, explanation, distribution and collection involved considerable time and effort. When arriving at these schools it was necessary to follow up original contacts made by letter and telephone to request that teachers respond to the questionnaire. There was the impression that, for some teachers, research needs were hardly a priority – a response to be expected – and that many had forgotten the researcher was coming, who they were, or what the purpose of the questionnaire might be. At this stage a careful explanation and re-explanation were invaluable. Despite these efforts, the percentage of responses was not as great as might have been wished (chapter 3.3.1): out of 158 teachers, only 72 completed the questionnaire – less than 50%. The gender of the researcher might have hampered the levels of response. There are also those social constraints of non-Omani teachers perhaps feeling that involvement in any kind of research might be inimical to their tenure, or even be seen as anti-social.

Results are reported with reference to the respondents as a single group – those SEN teachers within the three schools named. There are clearly important sub-divisions, and instances where results are different for sub-groups – school; gender; nationality; length of service – are examined specifically.

5.2: The sample profile

The first sections of the questionnaire were designed to collect background information about respondents: for example, sex, length of teaching service, qualifications, use of IST. Teaching experience may be one of the main variables to examine with regard to perceptions of problems with SEN provision; with greater experience there is the likelihood of greater depth and subtlety to pedagogy, though it is also possible that longer experience could lead to disenchantment. With longer experience of SEN comes, most crucially in this context, a longer experience of the vagaries of SEN policy, local and national provision, and those attitudes to disability dominant in society. Considerations of age may also be important; older SEN professionals may be more set in their ways and resistant to change, especially a change such as inclusion of the ZAP type where their own *raison d'être* may be called into question. On the other hand, age may bring wisdom and pedagogical complexity. The nationality and sex of teachers may also play a part in understanding the context of SEN provision – though not necessarily in any straightforward sense. Non-Omanis may in general be more restrained, perhaps even fearful that anything construed as criticism could endanger their contracts, and this could affect their responses in a highly contested area such as SEN provision. Women may well

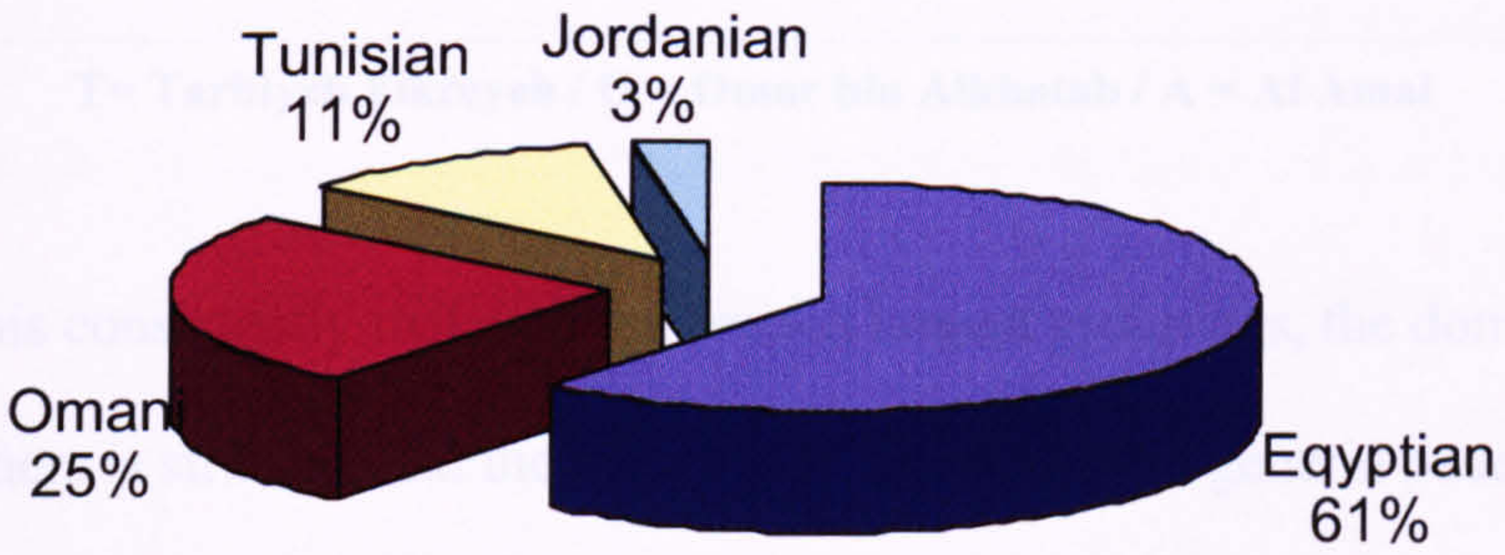
be more rather than less likely to proffer criticism because this questionnaire offers them the chance of a voice usually denied them in a patriarchal society. A consideration of the SEN professionals' profile helps to build a picture of the extent of the impact of personal and social backgrounds on attitudes. Better understanding of this group also makes visible those groups at whom some of the policy described in the analysis chapters is aimed.

5.3: Nationality of teachers

Omanization has meant the incremental replacement of non-Omanis with Omanis in a number of economic sectors (chapter 1.1). However, education – apart from the primary sector – has proved resistant to this process for one very good reason: the increasing demand on teachers has meant a continuing dependence on non-Omanis (Al-Belushi, 2003), a dependence exacerbated by the lack of a significant number of qualified Omani teachers – though this is changing (Ministry of Education, 2005). The non-Omani nationalities that are represented in the three schools – Egyptian, Tunisian and Jordanian – are also well represented in pedagogy as a whole in Oman. Egypt in particular is a country from which a high number of teachers for all levels of education have been recruited since 1970, and this is equally true since the establishment of higher education in Oman in 1983. There simply have not been enough trained Omanis remaining in the country to fill the teaching posts – and the number of teaching posts is increasing as the number of Omanis of school age increases. The presence of the three non-Omani groups can also be explained by the presence in their education systems of SEN teacher training. The dominance of Egypt is because it is the most populous Arab state with a long history

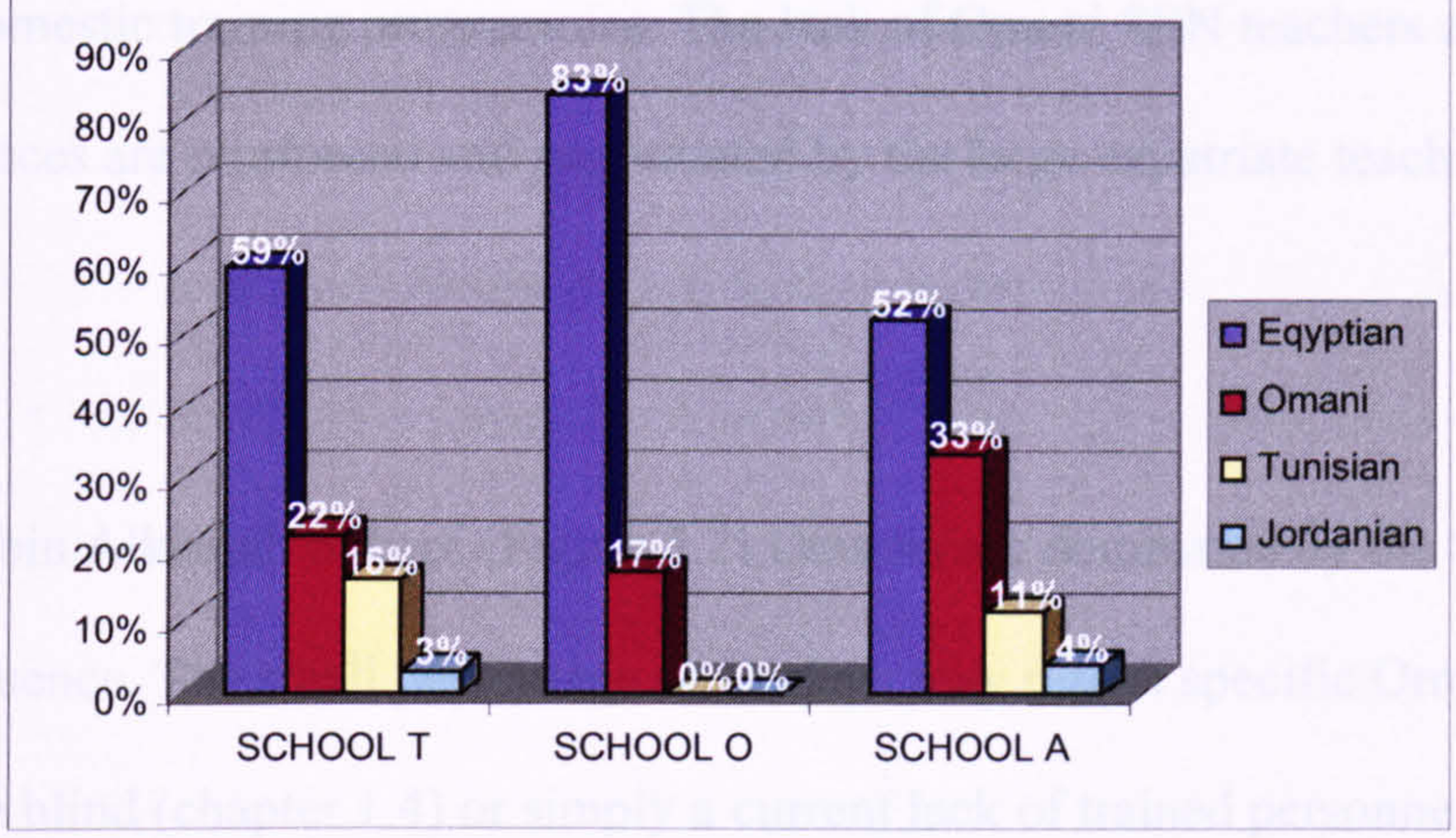
of higher education and too many graduates for its own domestic education market. SEN policy implementation may be slowed if the number of vocationally committed Omani SEN teachers does not increase; it is possible that expatriate teachers may not either be as open to innovations that reflect Omani needs nor as interested in suggesting generative responses to policy.

Figure 5.1: Respondents' Nationalities (%) n = 72



Although Omanis make up 25% of the respondents, their presence is dwarfed by that of Egyptians and of the 75% total of non-Omanis. This distribution of nationalities may have some effect on the provision of care within the three schools, and in the way provision can be changed.

Figure 5.2: Respondents' Nationalities by School (%)



T= Tarbiyeh Fikreyeh / O = Omar bin Alkhatab / A = Al Amal

Though Omanis consistently make up the second largest groupings, the dominance of Egyptian teachers is striking, and the presence of expatriates in general poses important questions in terms of SEN policy and provision. Does such dominance allow an effective Omani policy input into the running of the schools? Does such dominance de-culturalize SEN teaching? Does such dominance act as a brake to input from Omanis who may wish to advance or change provision according to developing social and pedagogical discourses? Does the dominance of expatriates generally encourage a top-down model of policy? Can there be any deep debate about SEN and integration or inclusion if the number of Omanis involved in provision is relatively low? Nationality is not a value-neutral quantity, especially in the sensitive field of education, and especially in the case of a country like Oman where SEN provision is a new experience. It may be that a large expatriate SEN teaching population reflects the lack of appropriate training available to Omanis, and indeed may reflect the lack of policy interest in building SEN provision through teacher training and might postpone valuable decisions by government. While

there remains a ready and cheap supply of trained personnel there is no need to institute expensive domestic training programmes. The lack of Omani SEN teachers and wider social prejudices are reinforced and perpetuated by the large expatriate teaching community.

In the Omar bin Alkhatab School (Figure 5.2) Omanis are dominated by the 83% Egyptian presence. The small percentage of Omanis may reflect specific Omani prejudice regarding the blind (chapter 1.4) or simply a current lack of trained personnel, or a combination of the two. Since one aim of any provision for the blind must be an adequate policy of social as well as economic integration, it is possible that Egyptians are not best suited to offer help towards such a complex and specifically localized aim. The largest representation of Omanis is in the Al Amal School for the Deaf, where Egyptians make up only 52%, and Omanis 35%. This may represent a greater acceptance in the Omani education community at least of deafness as an "educable" SEN.

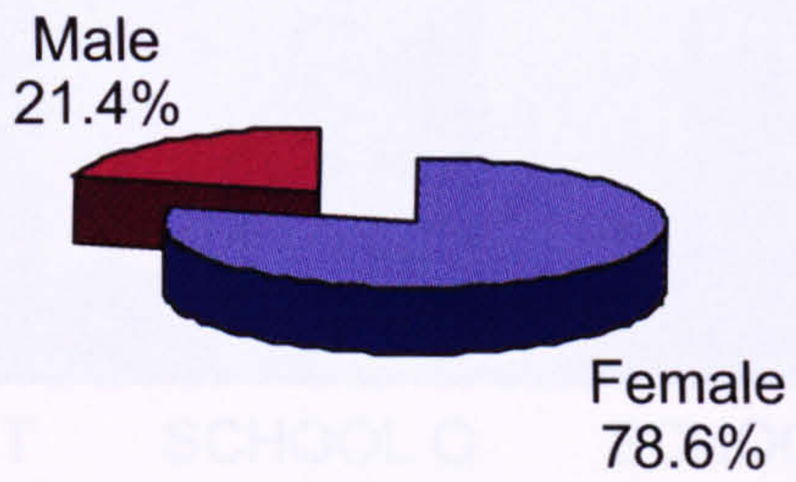
5.4: Gender of teachers

Because of the conservative nature of Omani society, one of the few professions open to women is teaching (Al Belushi, 2003). In this profession, most teachers do not have to experience a mixed sex environment, and many young females are encouraged into teaching because it is perceived as a more feminine and more appropriate occupation, which fits with a nurturing and caring idea of women (Al Musalamy, 1995). This is not an uncommon perception of and by women (Hantrais, 1990) across all societies.

> Education is the sector in which the biggest proportion of employed Omani women is found – 37.2% compared to less than 5% of the male workforce. 39.1% of all Omani workers in education are female … representing 82.7% of all Omani female professionals. (Al Belushi, 2003: 9)

Within the three SEN schools the single sex environments of state schools do not pertain, but this does not mean that SEN teaching is perceived as inappropriate for women: probably quite the contrary.

Figure 5.3: Breakdown of respondents by gender (%) n = 72

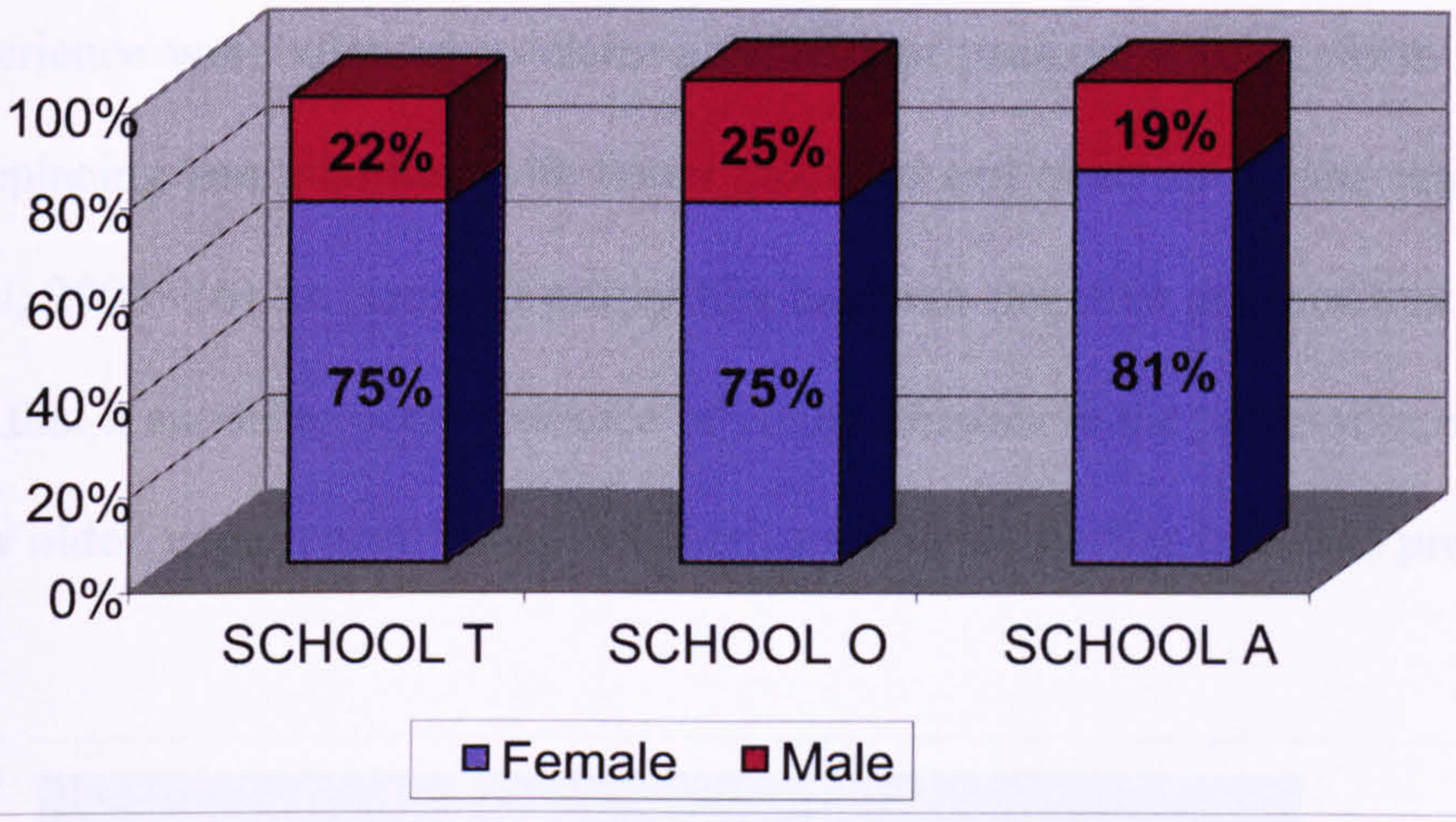


The dominance of women, which is similar in all three schools, is thus to be expected. Minor variations may be due to the newness of one of the schools, or the fact that fewer male teachers are available in certain specializations. This may reflect social attitudes more strongly than for female counterparts since the males are already engaged in a profession considered marginally appropriate: male responses to social prejudice may be more sensitive in situations where they are socially exposed.

Gender may present some particular difficulties for policy-makers and provision. In an area as culturally sensitive as this, Omani education policy-makers need to be aware of gender roles and their adaptation to educational realities. There may be problems with the

sexually mixed classes for female teachers: it is likely that families and especially husbands would not approve of a female teacher in front of a class that may be mainly male, and which may contain students with behavioural difficulties and some students in their early twenties.

Figure 5.4: Breakdown of Gender of staff by School (%)



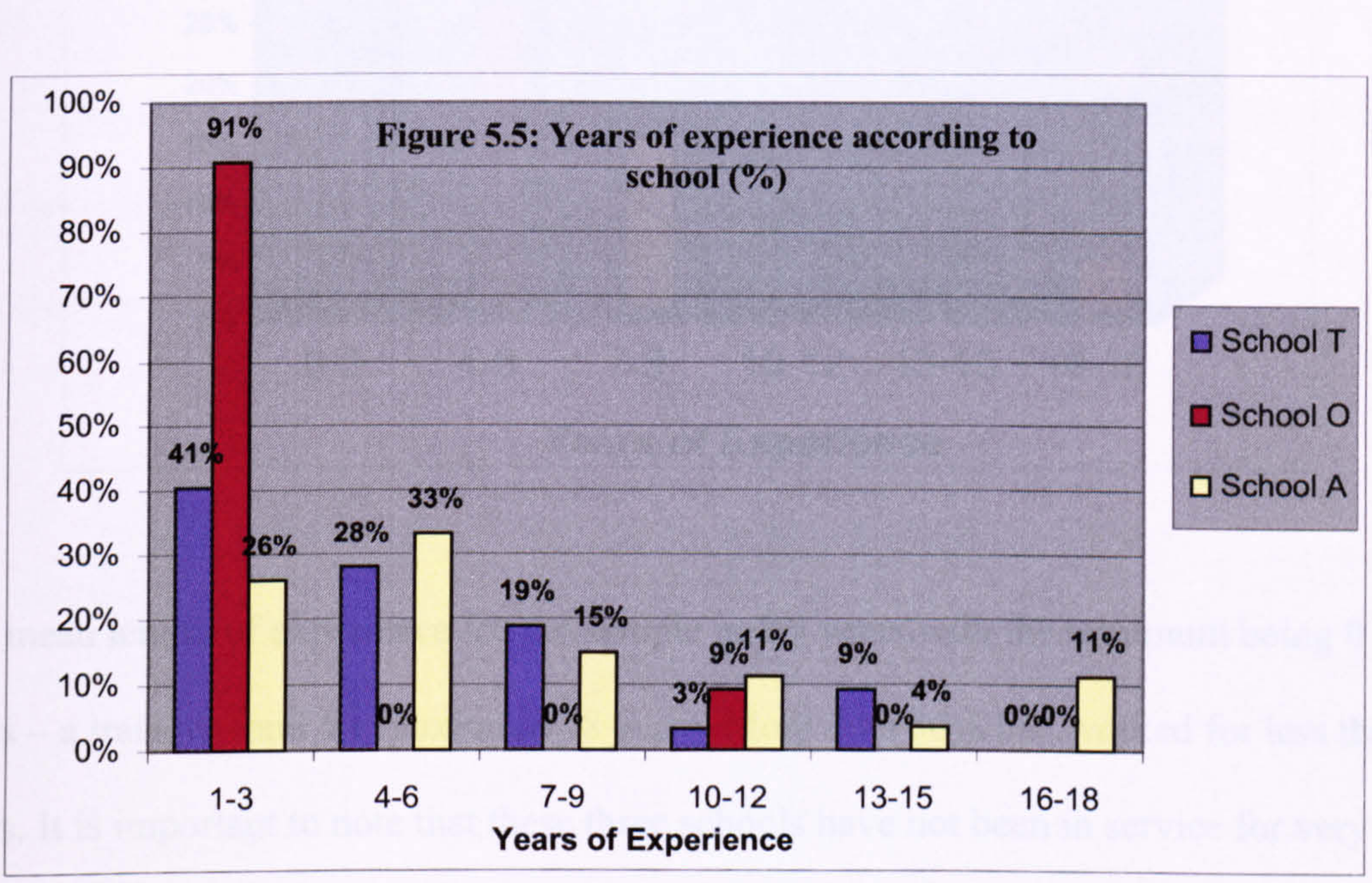
T= Tarbiyeh Fikreyeh / O = Omar bin Alkhatab / A = Al Amal

There is no substantive difference in the gender distribution of teachers between schools: the slightly higher percentage of women at the Al Amal School for the Deaf may reflect the higher degree of professionalism in teaching deaf students – male teachers being slightly less qualified than their female counterparts overall. Another explanation could suggest that the extra 6% is accounted for because work at Al Amal faces more educational and social restrictions: the challenge of teaching the deaf is seen as greater and intrinsically more rewarding. In terms of SEN policy the lack of appropriate male teachers may slow down policy provision and in some cases set back male students by

denying them valuable male role models. In a traditional Islamic society the lack of male teachers for boys may reinforce negative perceptions of SEN.

5.5: Length of experience of teachers

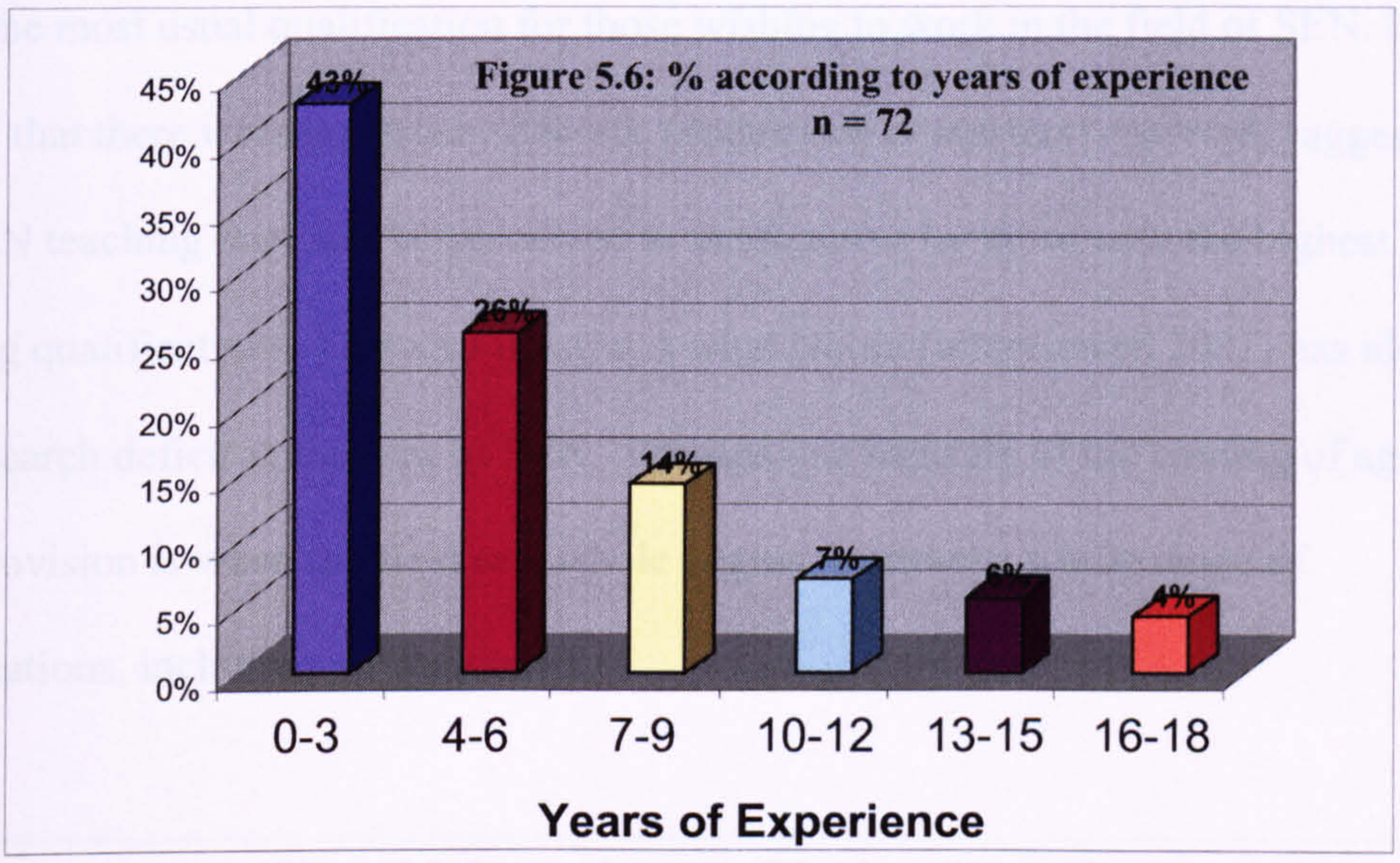
As part of the Omanization process there are other, associated reforms such as a restriction on the length of service of teachers. In 1996, teachers with a minimum 10 years' experience were allowed to claim a retirement package – this reform was partly aimed at replacing less qualified with better qualified and more up-to-date teaching staff (Al Belushi, 2003: 16). In terms of policy this has both negative and positive outcomes. Positive in that it encourages the entrance of young Omanis to the profession; negative in that the few older, experienced Omani teachers with much to offer leave the profession.



T= Tarbiyeh Fikreyeh / O = Omar bin Alkhatab / A = Al Amal

There are certain very obvious consequences of this policy in the data set. The first is the absence of staff with significant Omani experience, except, and notably, at the Al Amal

School for the Deaf. The range is between 1 and 9 years experience, and of these, the frequency of 1-6 years is greatest. This reflects the newness of SEN provision and suggests a significant shortfall in experienced teachers. There may also be a difficulty in retaining Omani staff – especially once the ten years' experience threshold has been reached and a retirement package is available. What these figures may also suggest indirectly is that, in SEN education, teacher burn-out (Cherniss, 1992; Leiter and Maslach, 1988) may occur much earlier than in mainstream education.



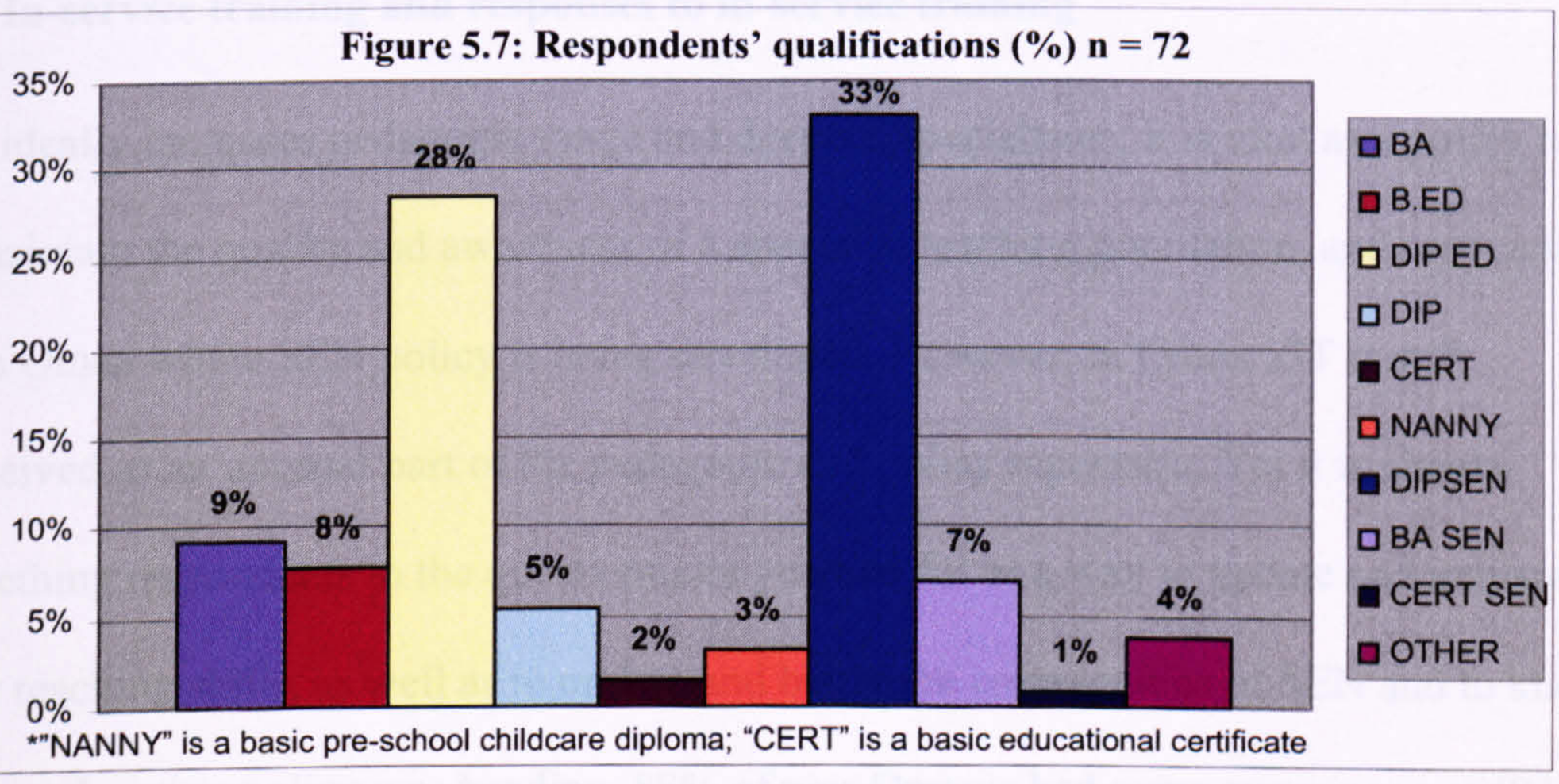
The mean length of experience for the sample is 7-9 years with the minimum being 0 years – a trainee – and the maximum 18 years. More than 50% had worked for less than 6 years. It is important to note that these three schools have not been in service for very long, and that their newness must have some effect on the perception of teachers within the sector, as well as the teaching profession more widely. It is possible that SEN and

linked teacher training would not be taken seriously by respondents in the interviews in the analysis chapters for this reason.

5.6: Qualifications of teachers

The two qualifications which were most frequently reported were the Diploma in SEN (33%) and the Diploma in Education (28%). General bachelors degrees, including Bachelor of Education made up 17%. The DipSEN (obtained in Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia, but not in Oman) was divided into specialisms – auditory, "mental" and blind – and is the most usual qualification for those wishing to work in the field of SEN. It was notable that there were no tertiary degrees (doctorates or masters) reported, suggesting that SEN teaching may still be perceived as unattractive by those with the highest teaching qualifications. This also illustrates what Noora (interviewed 2001) has identified as a research deficit in the area of SEN. Perhaps one measure of the coming of age of SEN provision is when the field as a whole begins to attract a whole range of qualifications, including postgraduates.

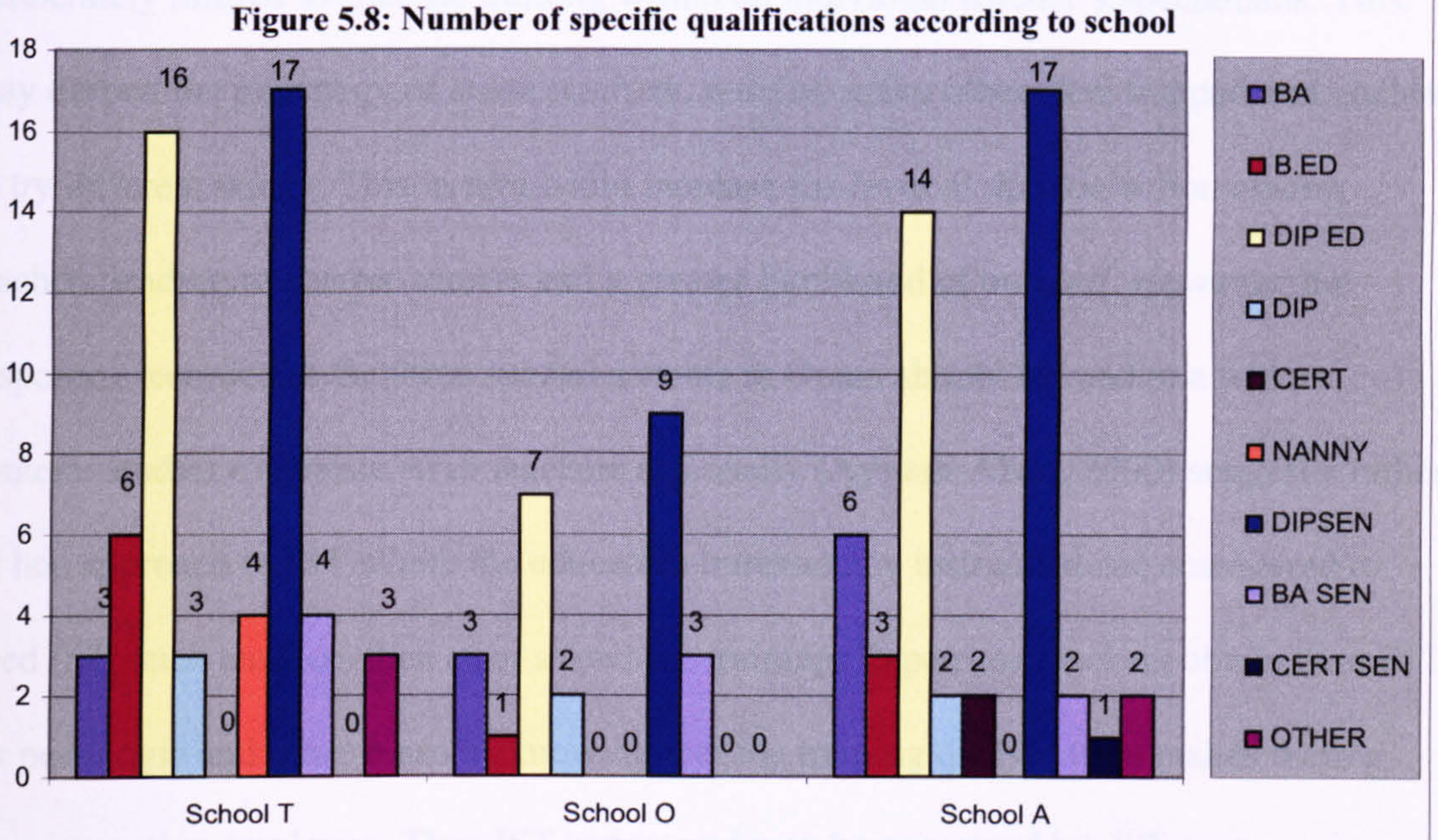
Figure 5.7: Respondents' qualifications (%) n = 72



*"NANNY" is a basic pre-school childcare diploma; "CERT" is a basic educational certificate

41% have an SEN-specific qualification. The spread of qualifications was similar across the different schools, although Omar bin Alkhatab School for the Blind, perhaps because it is newer and the number of respondents were fewer, has a narrower field of qualification even in SEN-specific areas.

Figure 5.8: Number of specific qualifications according to school



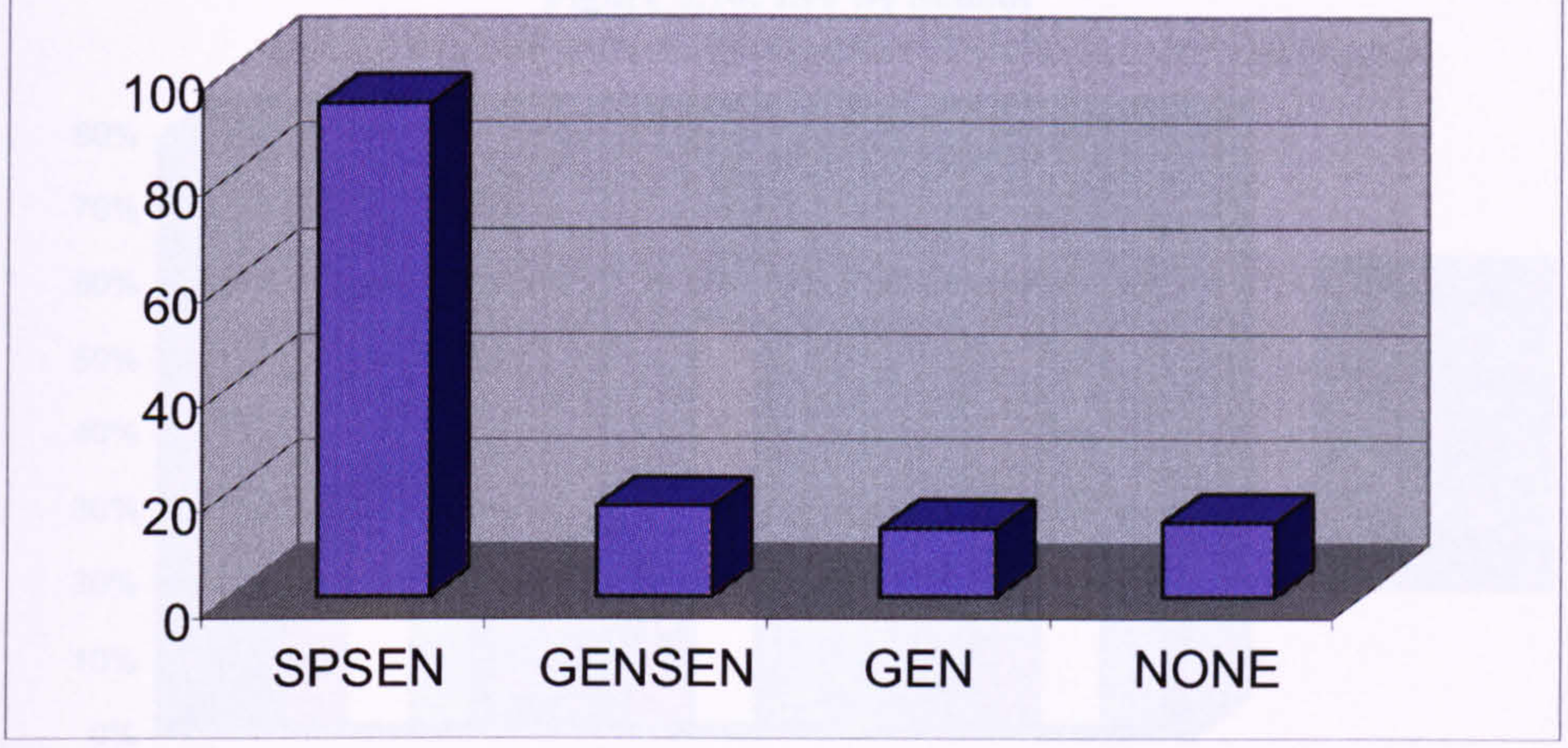
T= Tarbiyeh Fikreyeh / O = Omar bin Alkhatab / A = Al Amal

5.7: In-service training and responses to in-service training

IST ideally increases pedagogic range and deepens specialisms; it is vital as a policy tool to maintain the quality and awareness of a specialist teaching population, and especially so in Oman where SEN policy is being developed. However, in Oman IST is still perceived as an unusual part of the pedagogic and policy repertoire. Yet it is clearly something respondents to the questionnaire yearned for as a way to update and improve their teaching skills, as well as to understand better the complexities of SEN and to know where education policy was heading. 88% of non-Omanis had some experience of IST

specific to their work, all outside Oman, and some respondents recorded experience of more than one type – specialist SEN, general SEN or general pedagogical (see figure 5.9). This is one area that differentiates the SEN sector from mainstream education in Oman. As Weiss observes in other contexts (1999) the experience of IST can be deliberately limited to specific training within an individual teacher's specialisms. This may deepen the pedagogy of some teachers, but also make others feel trapped and unable to try different things. This in turn could increase the level of dissatisfaction among teachers leading to shorter careers and a greater likelihood of burnout. However, the responses recorded at the three special schools in Oman should be read in a wider context; studies of female Arab teachers regionally (Ayyash-Abdo, 2000) suggest a rather ad hoc approach to IST where the education bureaucracy instructs those considered to need IST; such teachers then *must* attend the training. Expatriate teachers obtain their IST for pedagogic and other reasons, knowing that the training qualification makes them a more attractive employee. Thus IST serves and may be perceived by different groups – expatriate teachers, specialist teachers, mainstream teachers – in different ways. The more disconnected a teacher becomes to their pedagogy, the less specialist their prior training, and the less competitive the job environment, the less use is made of IST. This may lead to a small and exclusive pool of SEN teachers, disconnected from education policy, the majority of whom remain expatriate teachers, allowing little useful diffusion of interested and talented Omanis.

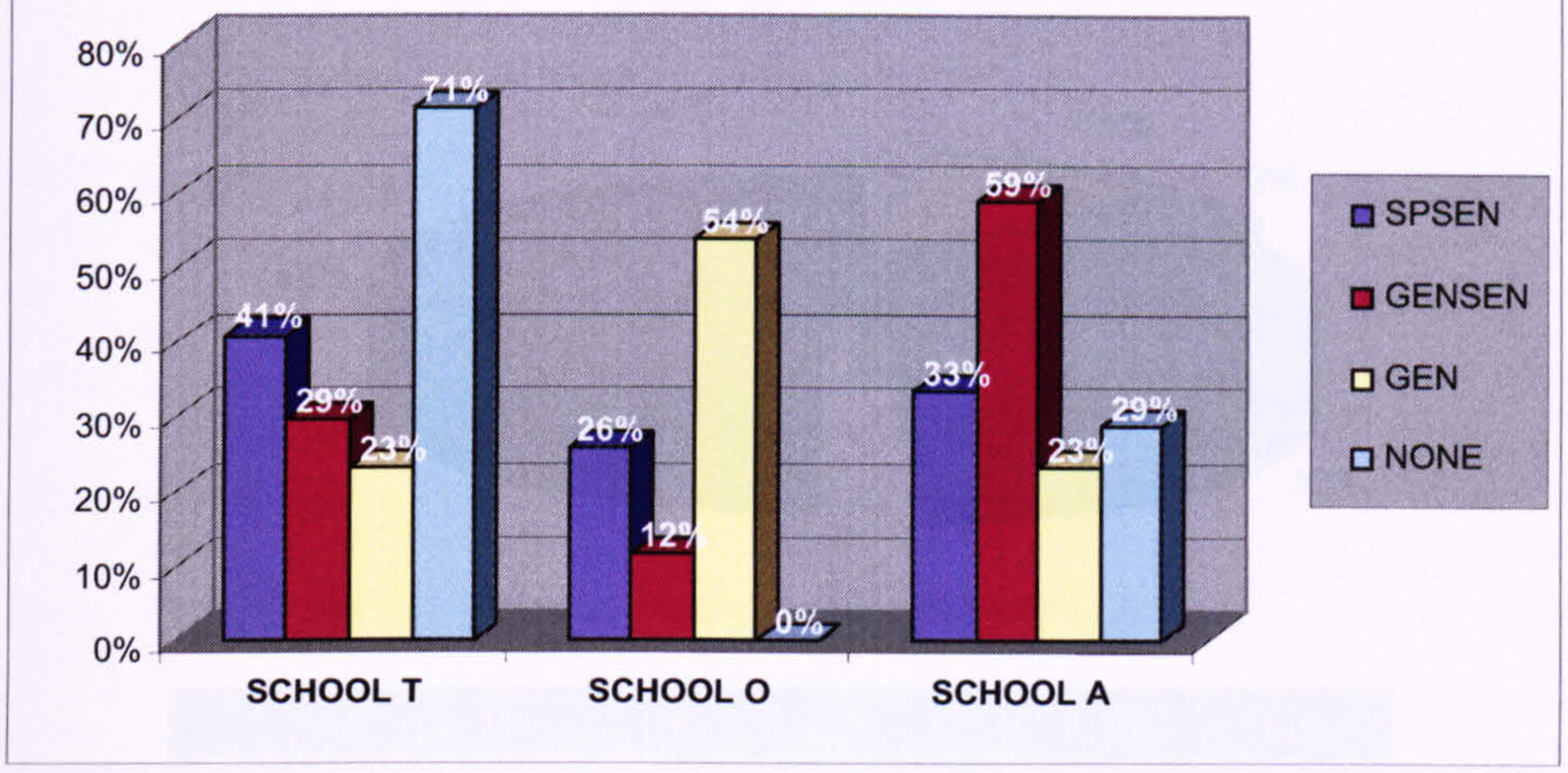
Figure 5.9: Experience of IST (%) n = 72



SPSEN = specific SEN; GENSEN = general SEN; GEN = general educational

While Omar bin Alkhatab School – dominated by 91% teachers with relatively short teaching careers most of whom are expatriate Egyptians – recorded some IST for all respondents, Tarbiyeh Fekriyeh School – where only 41% of respondents were new teachers – recorded 71% of the total respondents who had attended no SEN training or other IST whatsoever. Without IST the teaching body are not supported or instructed into new policy, and it is more likely that pools of teachers will find themselves cut off from policy-making discourses.

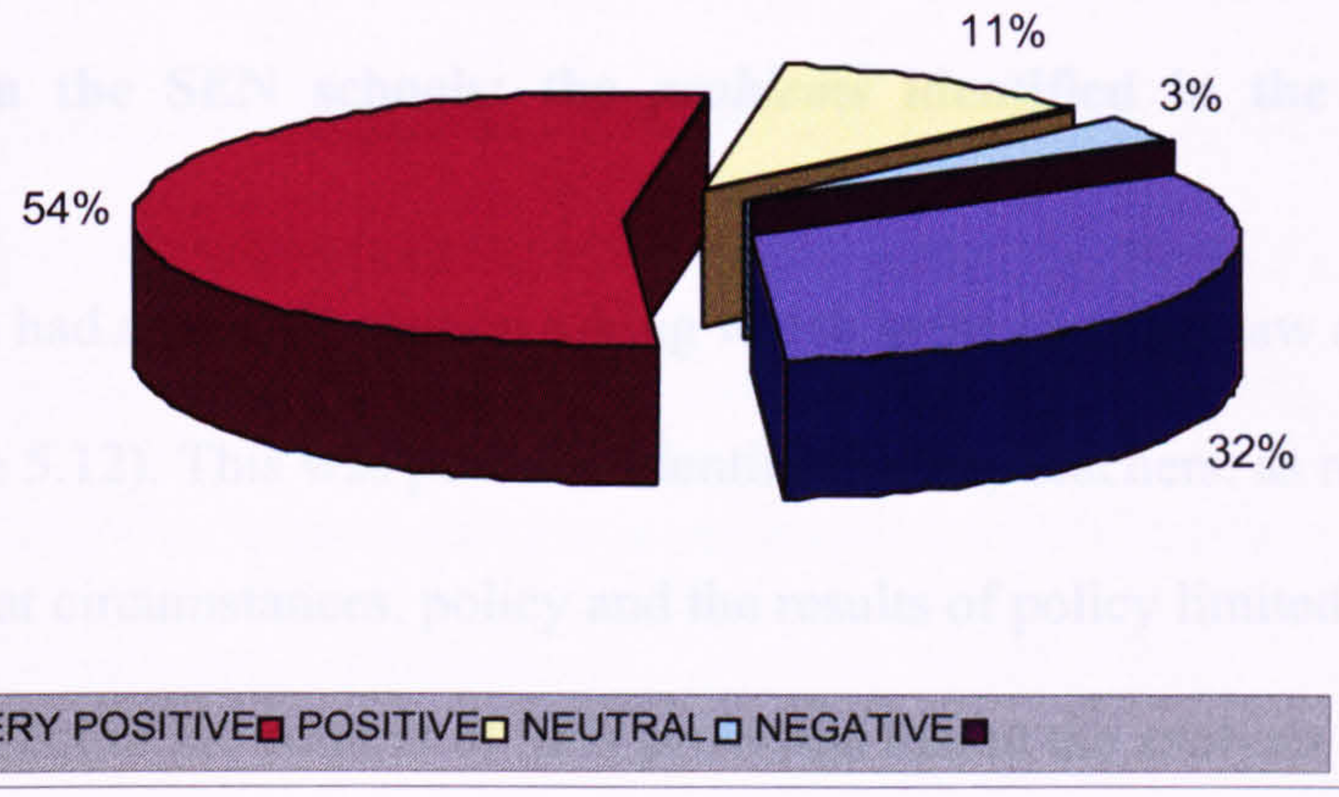
Figure 5.10: IST by School



T= Tarbiyeh Fikreyeh / O = Omar bin Alkhatab / A = Al Amal

This may be because "mental retardation" – which in the case of Tarbiyeh Fekriyeh covers a large number of mental disabilities – is not significantly covered by relevant IST courses: perhaps this is not seen as a priority among IST providers, public or private. However, it could also indicate a rigidity in pedagogy at a long-established institution – suggesting that as habits of meeting SEN are established so these displace a desire to improve or challenge those habits: risk may not be easy to take in an environment where getting by is a priority. It could also suggest a lack of interest in the education bureaucracy. It should be understood that IST, as a practice, reflects a certain level of philosophical security. The less IST, and the less IST is taken up, the more insecure the respective educational institutions – and the practices they represent – may be. Omar bin Alkhatab, being the newest, is maybe most likely to contain individuals open to new ideas and approaches, whose experiences outside Oman may automatically have exposed them to IST as a matter of course. Other Arab states – most notably Egypt and Jordan – have developed IST as a regular aspect of SEN pedagogy.

Figure 5.11: Response to IST



The questionnaire responses to the reality or possibility of SEN-related IST suggest that since teachers were very positive or positive there exists either a desire for its provision, or an experience of IST more generally which is favourably remembered. However, it may be unusual that as high a proportion as 14% were negative about IST – suggesting a section of teachers who may be resistant to change. This resistance may have its origins in experiences of poor IST or pedagogic conservatism, or the latter reinforcing the former. It is also interesting that the opinion of teachers split between positive and negative – there were none who simply did not know or care.

Despite the relative paucity of SEN-specific IST offered to SEN teachers – or indeed teachers in general in Oman – those that had experienced it were as positive as those who had experienced little or none. In fact the researcher noticed a correlation between those respondents who had experienced little IST and a positive attitude to the concept: clearly what they had experienced whetted their appetites. Nevertheless, responses in this area

once again might be constrained. It is easier and less dangerous to be positive about what is provided than to be critical – especially for non-Omanis.

5.8: Challenges in the SEN schools: the *problems* identified in the questionnaire responses

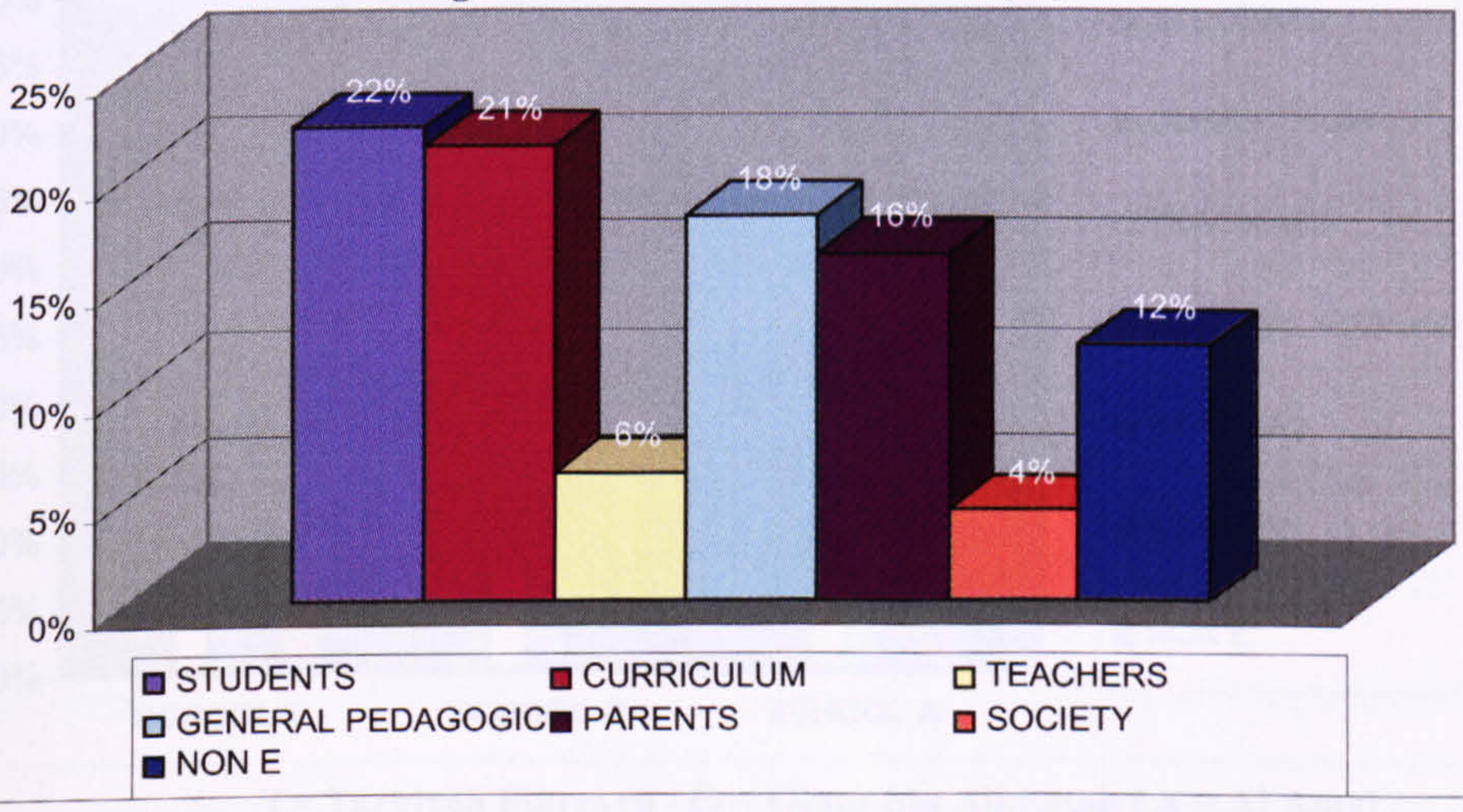
The questionnaires had a specific section asking which areas teachers saw as particularly problematic (figure 5.12). This was posed to identify the way teachers, as recipients of SEN policy, felt that circumstances, policy and the results of policy limited their work. This outlines an aspect of the context of SEN provision that at the analysis stage of this research may be lost to sight.

Perhaps predictably, one of the most commonly identified problems for teaching staff was the curriculum in use in the school; notably its inappropriateness. This is closely linked to perceived resource inadequacies – lack of appropriate equipment and books or a suitable environment. But one particularly telling finding was that parental rather than wider social inadequacies were seen to be a defining problem. This is almost certainly because the teachers have some contact with parents and less often receive input – through media or Ministerial visits – from what might be called society or government policy. The criticism of students and parents may be weighed together since, in the SEN context, pedagogic care goes beyond the purely educational and will include a child's complete environment – the family from which they come. Although contact with students and parents may not always be straightforward in the context of SEN in Oman, to identify students and parents as a problem suggests teachers are uncomfortable with their jobs. SEN students – the core material – were reported by the teachers as the major

problem. This is not the same as seeing the students as a challenge: the connotation is that the ideal student does not present problems. In this negative perception of the pedagogy, the work itself may be undermined in the routine of the teacher. This problematization of the SEN students means teachers may be more likely to experience burnout and to leave the profession early (Leiter and Maslach, 1988); teachers no longer see challenges to be overcome but only problems with students that will wear them down. This negative perception of some SEN students must have an effect on teachers' attitudes to SEN policy, perhaps increasing their cynicism.

Taken together with the other major perceived problems – curriculum, general pedagogy and other teachers – this suggests an uncomfortable teaching environment. Some of the discomfort may be put down to general environmental conditions – the prefabricated classrooms, lack of equipment and necessary tools, no air conditioning, none or few sports facilities – but these would not by themselves affect their overall wellbeing as educators.

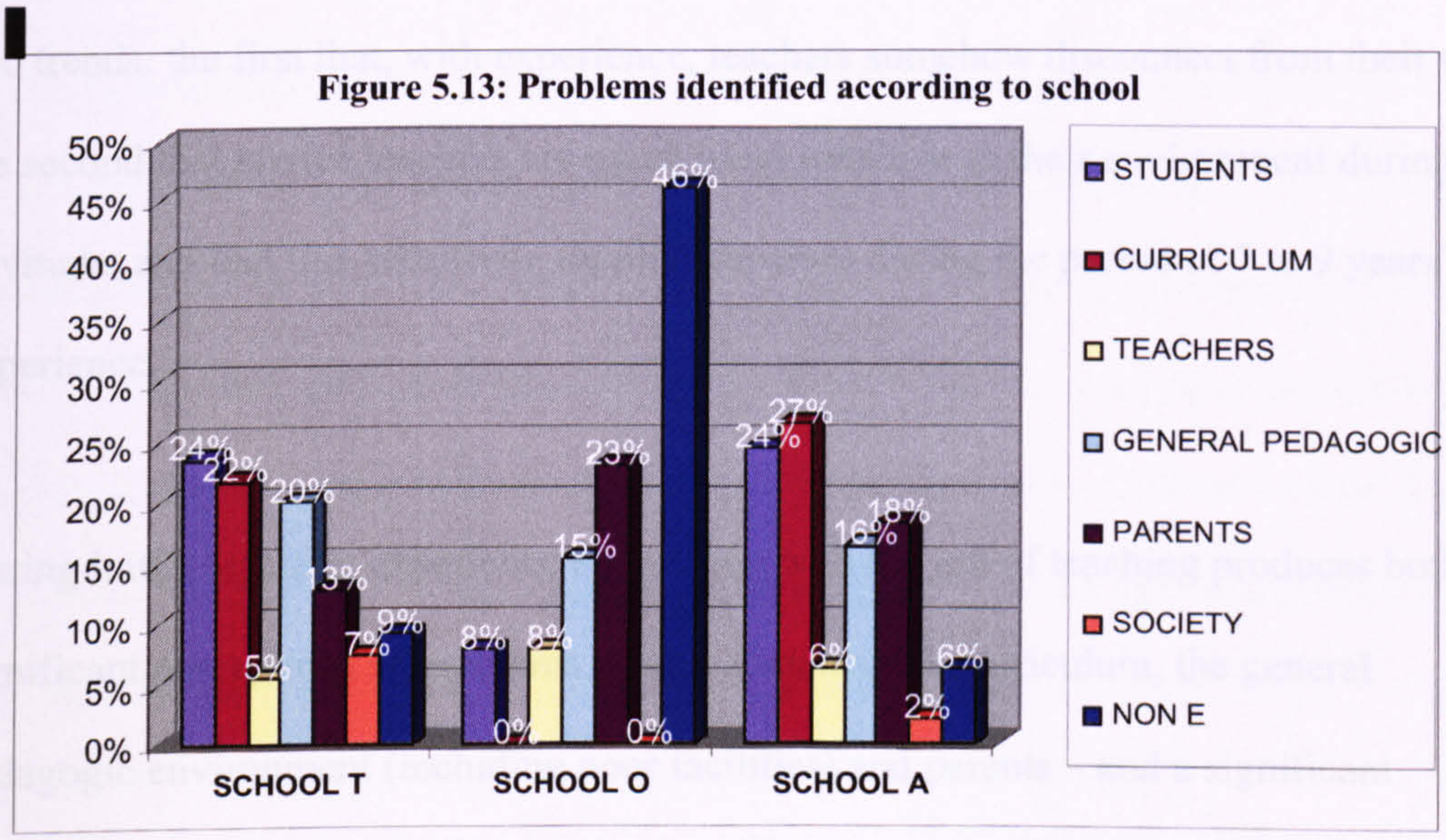
Figure 5.12: Problems identified (%)



Perceptions of students as problems – reflecting the use of that word by many interviewees in the 2003 data set – suggests a pedagogical inadequacy. Those teaching students with SEN should, like any teachers, see their charges' potential, not their shortcomings. In terms of how such teachers would be receptive to changes in SEN policy, it is likely that their attitude would be less favourable and might even be resistant to change. It is also possible that education policy-makers, aware of such attitudes, would be less inclined to devote time and energy to SEN provision or take such provision seriously.

When the problems are divided according to individual school it seems that the most positive teachers are working in the newest school – Omar bin Alkhatab – where only the parents scored as a significant difficulty. Perhaps this reflects older social taboos linked to blindness. Students registered in only 7% of replies, and the curriculum – a major source of discord in each of the other schools – in none. This could be because there has not been adequate time for teachers to experience and evaluate the curriculum.

Figure 5.13: Problems identified according to school



T= Tarbiyeh Fikreyeh / O = Omar bin Alkhatab / A = Al Amal

The category "none" in figure 5.13 reflects the percentage of questionnaire respondents who chose not to define a specific problem.

Both Al Amal and Tarbiyeh Fakriyeh schools identified students as problematic in 24% of responses: while this may be predicable for the latter, which includes students with a wide variety of psychological differences in the same classes, therefore reflecting a certain amount of predictable pedagogic difficulty, Al Amal only deals with deafness. Perhaps what is being registered is student disquiet. This would then be acknowledged in the responses as a curricular inadequacy. Behind all these statistics is the presence of a large body of SEN students whose voices are only heard when filtered through the reactions of their – often not very sympathetic – teachers. The more problems teachers register the more disquiet – even anger – may be being felt by those they teach.

Although the question of burnout (Al-Belushi, 2003) may suggest that perceptions of problems increase with experience, this may not necessarily be so. Figure 5.14 suggests two trends: the first that, with experience, teachers somehow disconnect from their work; the second that novice teachers are much more sensitive to their environment during their novitiate, and that this sensitivity rapidly disperses during the period of 7 to 9 years' experience.

During initial teaching experience connection with the job of teaching produces both significant perceptions of problems – from students, the curriculum, the general pedagogic environment (including poor facilities) and parents – and a significant percentage who report no problems. The newer teachers were more likely to have SEN-

specific qualifications. Presumably these teachers are still enthused with their work, and this enthusiasm lasts through, but not beyond, the 4 to 6 year period. Perceptions of problems from general pedagogic sources – poor text books, no IT equipment, inadequate classrooms (all noted by the researcher in observed notes) – remain more or less a steady disquiet: part of the background noise of teaching.

The Tarbiyeh Fikreyeh School's facilities were very limited: useful areas such as carpentry and other handicraft training were poorly supplied with the necessary materials; the lack of SEN-specific equipment was mentioned by six respondents. The reasons for poor supply were clearly budgetary. PE and other sporting facilities were basic, although there were two playing fields for volleyball and football. Responses in questionnaires suggest that sharing facilities with mainstream schools would be useful, though one may wonder whether filling holes in provision by "borrowing" from elsewhere (presumably at times dictated by the owners of those facilities) would be useful in the long term.

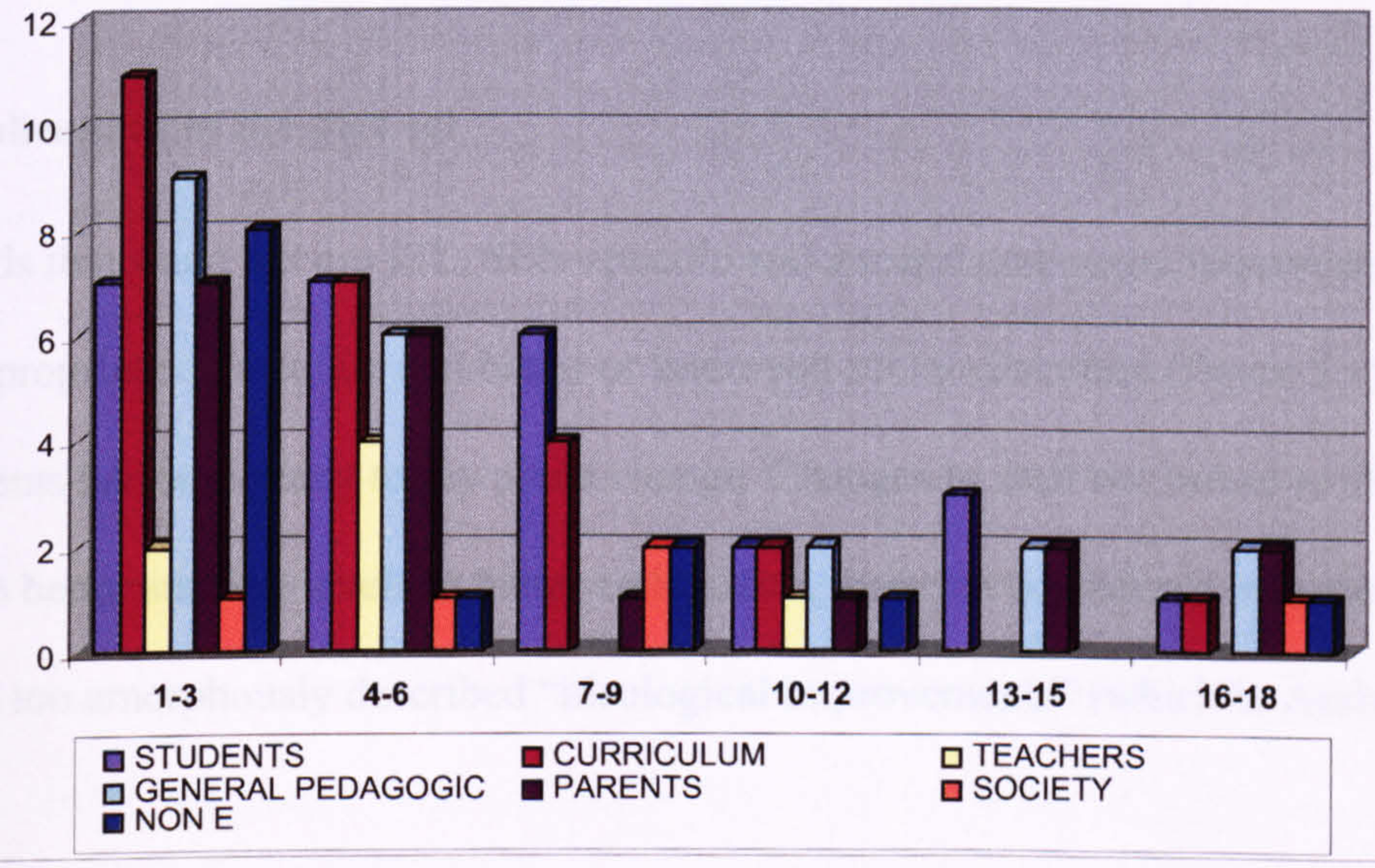
At the Al Amal School the spread of ages from 6 to 22 years is considerable; one teacher (fewer than was the case for the respondents from the Tarbiyeh Fekriyeh school) felt classes were too large and that there should be sexual segregation. Interestingly, Al Amal's policy is rigidly segregationalist when it comes to allowing other disabilities into the school: a deaf person with some other SEN would not be eligible for a place. This may either reflect a lack of appropriate resources or, perhaps, an ideological stricture that perceives deafness as different or even superior to other forms of SEN.

Facilities and their use vary. There was some specialized equipment for IT, sport, carpentry and sewing. Boarding facilities are unsupervised over weekends. 13 buses are available, well below a number adequate to the needs since Al Amal is the only school for the deaf in the country. A lack of teaching materials is reported by 5 respondents.

In Omar bin Alkhatab some concerns were expressed about parental knowledge and involvement, one of the common findings of the questionnaires. The need for greater SEN awareness of parents (2 respondents) and the need for parent-teacher meetings (1 respondent) suggests parents may be poorly informed. Perhaps once again this problem is because of poor education both formal and social, poor female education, and a lack of available medical information or expertise; many parents live in distant regions which can only be reached with difficulty. In such areas superstitious or negative attitudes to disability may persist; certainly it is difficult for medical services to provide guidance and support in such areas. Media in general are not organized to inform society and change attitudes. Since 42 Omar bin Alkhatab students live on campus there may develop an ideological disjunction: parents from lower socioeconomic groups who are not in regular contact with the school, do not see what is being done, and are unable to access parent-teacher activities (when these are available). Their child remains "unusual" because they do not get a chance to see the functioning collegiate activities where many other children, much like their own, are seen as "normal" rather than "deviant". Education policy-makers may be much like parents in this way: not having direct or having only limited contact with SEN students suggests those students will always be seen as "abnormal", fitting in with difficulty to education policy discourses.

Omar bin Alkhatab School, following the practice of only dealing with the specific SEN for which it was designed, only has links with the Al Noor Association for the Blind, or with other basic institutions caring for the blind. Wider SEN cooperation is not considered necessary. Once again, this may isolate specialist teachers within their narrow fields, exaggerating differences between SENs and not allowing a community of interests to develop. Poor communication between schools and the specialisms they represent may be symptomatic of a more general lack of communication at every level. Respondents from Omar bin Alkhatab School did highlight a lack of teacher intercommunication, and teacher stress (1 respondent each) which were not shown in responses at other schools. This isolationism is visible in the plan to turn books into Braille, which relies on teachers' individual commitment. Communication between similar teachers facing similar challenges, or between teachers and the education hierarchy was absent. There is no planned Braille-based curriculum projected by the Ministry of Education.

Figure 5.14: Improving provision – teachers' views by years of experience



One important motivation for teachers in general is the variety of human contact the experience offers (Al Belushi, 2003: 222); the key contact is with students. Examination of motivation (Hean and Garrett, 2001) suggests that the relationships that are developed between students and teachers are what sustain teachers' commitment and contentment. In the particular environment of SEN teaching this sustaining relationship is of a very special kind, and may be particularly vulnerable to other variables. Many Omani teachers in mainstream education do not teach for either money or kudos or the possibility of advancement, but rather for intrinsic rewards (Al Belushi, 2003: 223): feeling better about oneself because pupils have achieved and become motivated. This may well also be the case within SEN teaching. The question of motivation may be of particular importance in SEN teaching and teacher training – it involves a holistic philosophy that sustains the entire scholastic community, and is fed from outside by parents, government organizations, the media and social perceptions. What may be evident here is the vulnerability of SEN teaching to that de-motivation described in the unique Omani mainstream education context by Al Belushi (2003).

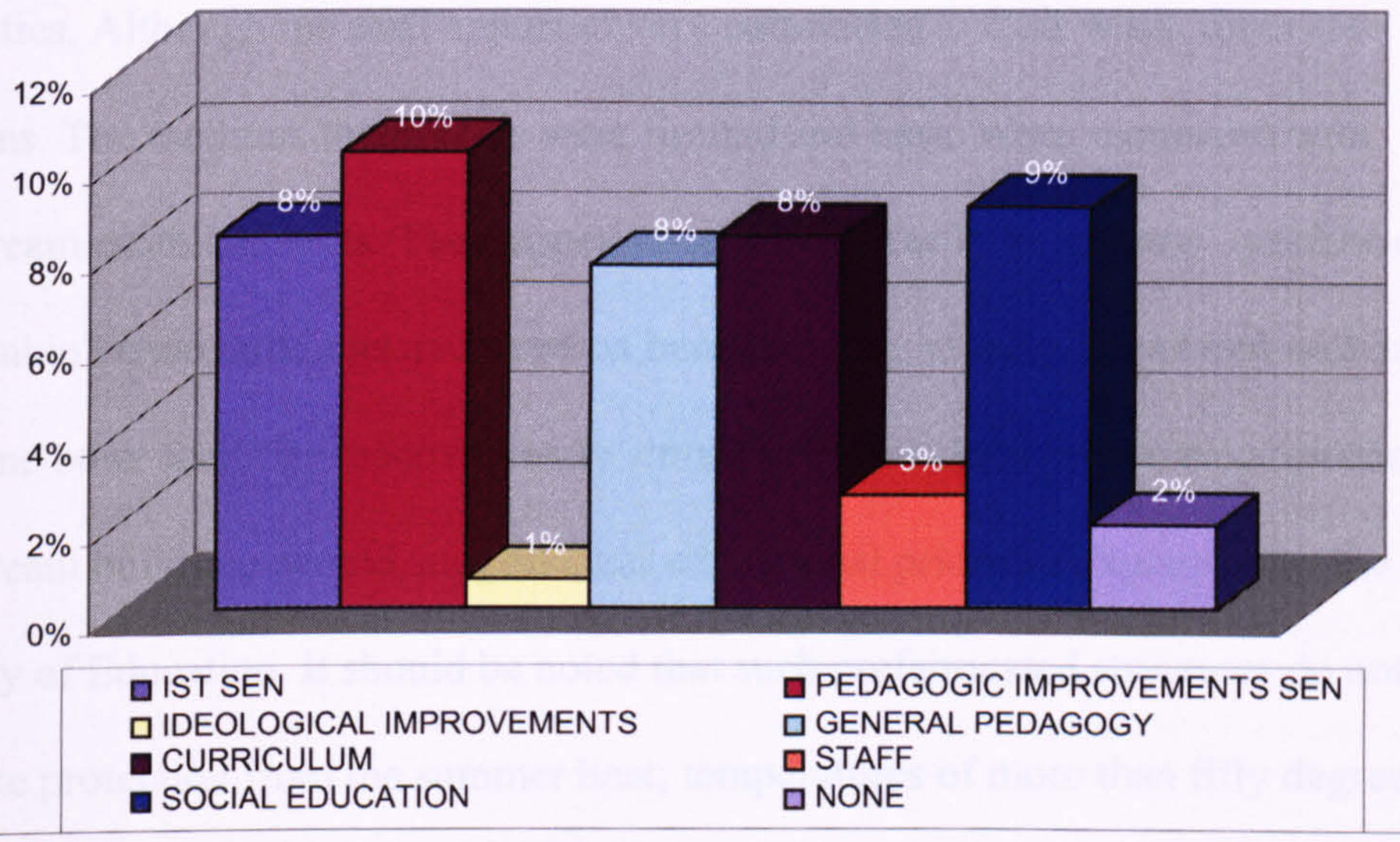
5.9: Implications of the data set

The needs that stand out are IST, SEN-specific and general pedagogic improvements, more appropriate curriculum and better or improved social education (figure 5.15). Most respondents had something to say about change. Changes to staff not linked to IST but, rather, to better staffing levels or better collegiality, were not considered important. Nor were the too amorphously described "ideological improvements" (which in Arabic is

translated as "better policy ideas") perhaps because answering this question in the affirmative might have entailed political criticism.

The lack of reticence suggested by figure 5.15 may be due to the dominance of Egyptian and Omani teachers, the dominance of female teachers, and the relative youth of the teachers and the position of the three special schools *outside* mainstream Omani education. Egyptians, coming from a strong pedagogic tradition, may be clearer in their ideas of provision. In the predominantly feminized environment, answering questions posed by a female researcher, women may also be more likely to find a voice. The younger the staff the less likely they may be constrained by social mores.

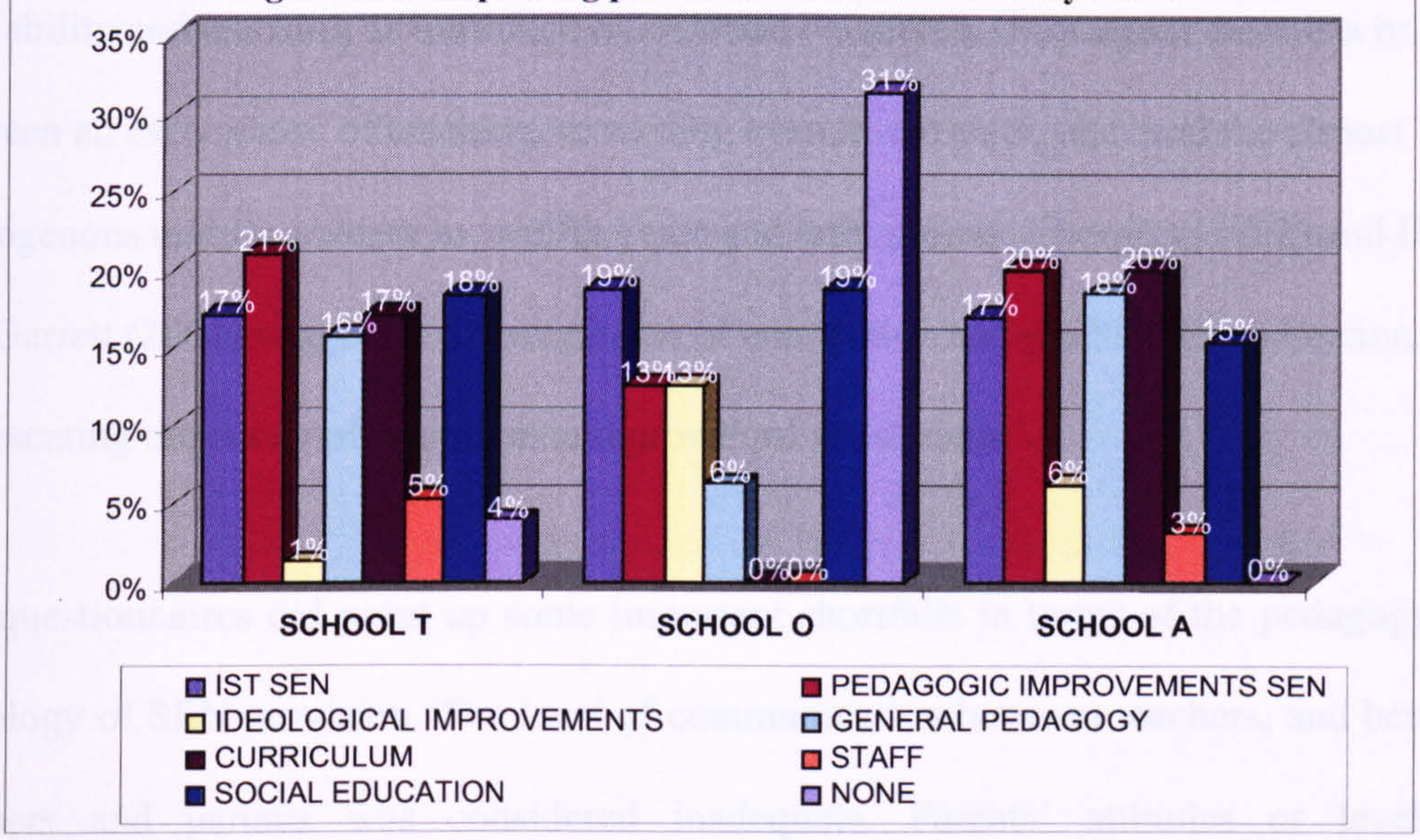
Figure 5.15: Improving provision – teachers' views



As figure 5.16 indicates, there is little essential difference between the Tarbiyeh Fekriyeh and Al Amal schools in terms of recommendations, but once again the newer Omar bin Alkhatab school stands out for its optimism: 31% have no particular suggestions for reform. From this percentage it may be inferred that newer facilities, staff with shorter

experience of the institution, and a collegiate presence which has as yet not had time to acquire a history and develop a personality, make for a general positive viewpoint. In other words, fewer suggestions for reform may not mean deeper pedagogic contentment. Nevertheless, the newer school does seem to be succeeding better in terms both of curriculum and facilities, and stands out in a number of ways. The architectural layout is well designed with the needs of blind students clearly in mind, and with sections for different ages: of the three schools examined, this may have been the one whose design was best thought out. UNESCO is provisionally engaged in designing IT equipment for the school, the only major NGO involved in any of the three schools. Also, Omar bin Alkhatab has the highest teacher-student ratio of any of the three schools, at 1:10. This should be compared to the Tarbiyeh Fekriyeh school for those with psychological disabilities. Although the staff appeared very committed to their work, there are problems. The facilities themselves were limited and basic when compared with mainstream establishments. Their appearance was distinctly temporary – prefabricated "portacabin" style buildings anchored on hard standing, closely-linked and with lavatory and some other facilities inconveniently situated. The obvious negative comparison with mainstream buildings would suggest clear educational priorities expressed by the Ministry of Education. It should be noted that such prefabricated structures do not give adequate protection from the summer heat; temperatures of more than fifty degrees can be reached in the summer months.

Figure 5.16: Improving provision – teachers' views by school

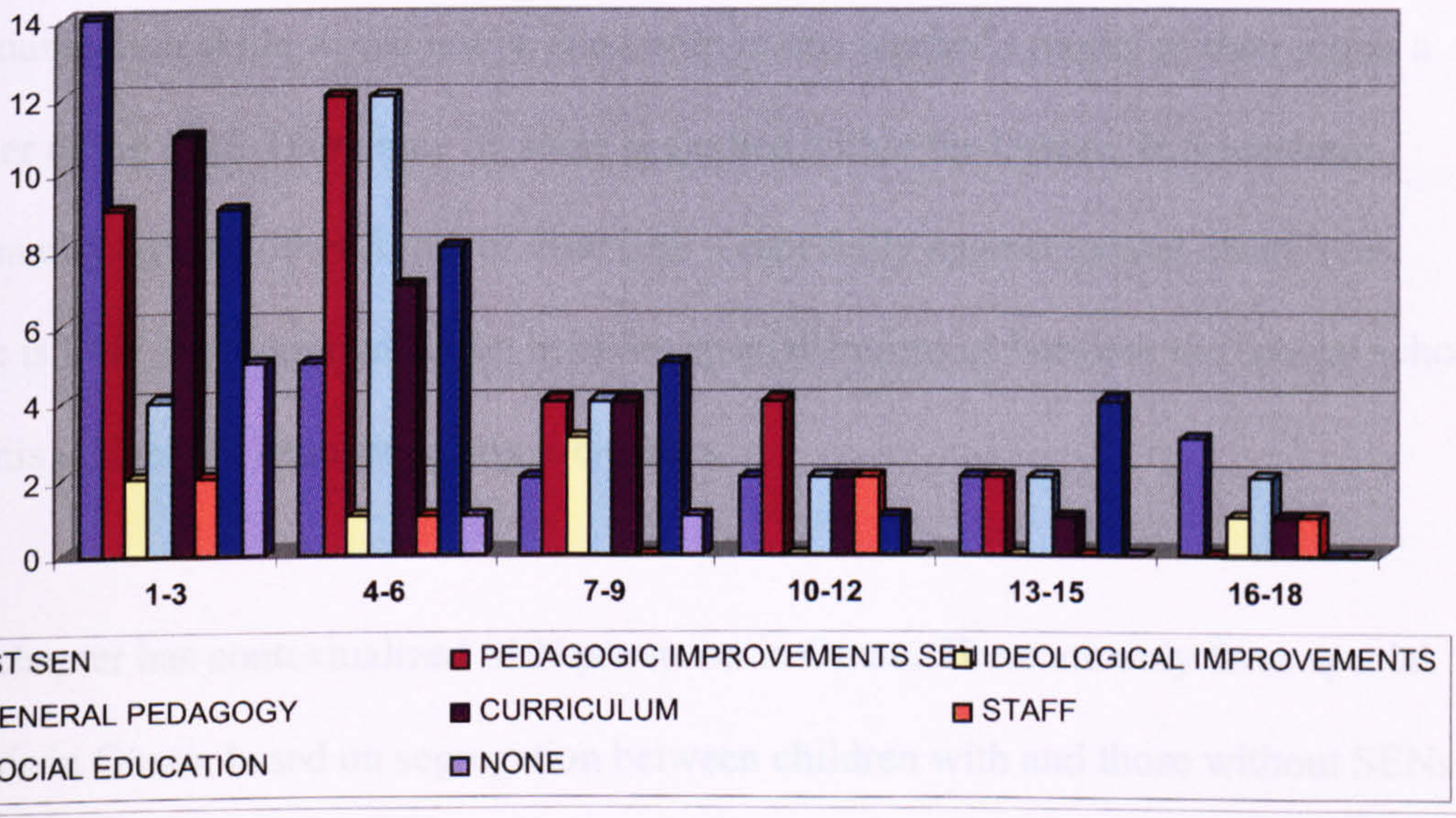


Just as perceptions of problems vary according to years of experience, so do the nature of those suggestions for improving provision made in the questionnaires. The greatest demand by novice teachers is for IST, yet this recommendation falls away dramatically very quickly. This may be because a certain cynicism creeps in, and the enthusiasm felt initially evaporates leaving a functional approach to teaching. It also reflects the probability that younger teachers are more open to new ideas, while those with longer careers become resistant not only to change but to anything that might upset the routine and relatively comfortable nature of their pedagogy. What replaces the recommendation for IST after the novitiate phase seems to be a stronger interest in the supply of teaching equipment and immediate teaching environment – in other words there is a shift from an interest in updating teaching method and learning new concepts, to being more comfortable in the classroom. This is not to belittle the need for pedagogic and general pedagogic improvements: a white board, globe, computer and air conditioner are not

luxuries; however there is a shift between the perception of teaching as centred on one's own ability and teaching as improved by external resources. Once again there is a break between an early phase of teaching, extending even to the sixth year, and the almost homogenous middle seventh to twelfth years and later phases. Cherniss (1992) and Hean and Garrett (2001) suggest there are phases of connection and gradual disconnection, representing the decay of optimism and growth of pessimism.

The questionnaires did point up some important shortfalls in terms of the pedagogy and sociology of SEN provision. The level of communication between teachers, and between teachers and parents was considered inadequate. Parents' attitudes or levels of understanding of their children's needs as well as wider social awareness were picked out by respondents as problems needing addressing. Interestingly, media were seen by five respondents to be a key to lowering stigma attached to SEN (see chapter 4.1.2).

Figure 5.17: Recommendations according to years of experience



At Al Amal, similarly with all the three schools, parents were seen as a significant problem: they were considered uncooperative, not giving appropriate care and lacking knowledge of their child's SEN. 6 respondents felt parents needed some kind of education in SEN, or "awareness" training. Parental cooperation and understanding depended very much to which socio-economic group they belonged. Although some socialization problems were perceived among the students, this was offset by the perceived need for more specialists – from psychologists to better qualified staff in general.

Overall, teachers' perceptions of their jobs, especially if they had been in the profession for a considerable period, were simple – restricted by a pathologized perception of disability (chapter 6.3.1) (Clark, Dyson and Milward, 1998). The teachers seem to see their jobs as dealing with the SEN for which they have been trained, and any complication of that specialization is unwarranted – an intrusion into what they know best. This was magnified in responses which suggested that poor cognitive or communication skills would not be dealt with in one teacher's model of their job as a teacher of the deaf. There may be some prejudice within the Omani SEN teaching community against other forms of disability – especially against mental disabilities. There is little intercommunication between specializations or between the special schools and this is likely to exacerbate any prejudices.

This chapter has contextualized SEN provision in Oman. There are only three special schools in Oman, based on segregation between children with and those without SENs and between different medicalized categories. The effects of abstract education and social

policies can be seen in terms of how provision flows – or fails to flow adequately – on the ground. Here researcher observations are added to statistical details from the three dedicated Omani SEN schools. What are identified are the concerns of SEN teachers, their problems, their views on improving provision, and a sense of their overall satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The question of whether the SEN qualifications of Egyptian, Tunisian or Jordanian teachers – who dominate the three schools – are sensitive to the needs in Oman have been raised. The dominance of Egyptians in particular, despite the policy of Omanization (chapters 1.1 and 4.1) slowly becoming effective elsewhere, suggests that SEN may not be perceived by key policy-makers as part of the recognized education discourse in Oman. The schools are not well-resourced; only 41% of the 72 teachers surveyed had a specialist qualification. Implicit in the questionnaire responses were the lack of adequate training among Omanis, the low status of SEN teachers, and the lack of intrinsic rewards.

The observations document provision at the chalkface, indicating the low status in terms both of practice and therefore of education policy for SENs. There is also the suggestion that SEN provision is constructed as a ghetto rather than as part of mainstream pedagogy, an aspect of provision that may well be reflected in policy. Instead of perceiving SEN students' potential both they and their parents were frequently identified as "problems" in the questionnaires.

INTRODUCTION TO THE ANALYSES IN CHAPTERS 6, 7 AND 8

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 analyse the 18 interviews carried out in Oman in March 2003 (see table 6.1) – interviews with those directly involved in teacher training in the Sultanate, either at the teacher training colleges or at the teacher training facility of the Department of Psychology at SQU. As a result of coding and analysing the data was found to cluster around certain key areas: concepts, policy and the disjunction between the two. Concepts deals with those theoretical constructs most commonly evinced by the interviewees; policy teases out past, current and possible future educational policy as perceived, experienced and hoped for by the interviewees, while also presenting and developing the dependent bead thread analogy of policy-making within the autocratic educational system. Disjunction explores the lack of fit between concepts of SEN and policy – the way concepts feed into policy to create or fail to create an adequate fit. The aim of these three chapters is to answer the research questions that guided the interviewing and coding processes:

1. Is there an identifiable set of ideas and practices currently operational among teacher trainers, and more widely in the pedagogic environment, with regards to SEN? What are the concepts held most widely?

2. Is it possible to identify a particularity in the process of education policy-making in Oman which may, possibly, be applied to other developing states?

3. If there are disjunctions between concepts expressed and policies made in teacher training and SEN, what might these be?

4. Do the experiences of SEN and teacher training articulated in the global literature have relevance to the very unique conditions in Oman?

The three chapters aim to deliver as clear a picture of the dominant concepts among teacher trainers in Oman as the data set allows; then link this picture to a description of those policies operating, perceived as operating, or perceived as needed or threatened. Finally the concepts and policies are compared to identify those areas where the two seem most poorly matched.

It should be noted that these chapters are only dealing with education policy – its transmission and reception and effects – and do not attempt any wider-ranging critique of governance.

CHAPTER 6: ANALYSIS PART 1 – CONCEPTS

This chapter teases out the concepts expressed explicitly or implicitly by the interviewees; asking whether these represent personal, localized or more widespread (social) ideological paradigms (Durkheim, 1950). This is a reconstruction of key concepts in the context of SEN and teacher training. The analysis focuses on different conceptions of SEN, drawing on the responses of 18 key teacher trainers, education and SEN personnel. There are certain key ways SENs are conceptualized: as purely medical, psychomedical, psychological or behavioural phenomena. In terms of Oman's short relationship with universal educational provision, the recent development of strategic educational thought, and limited policy application, this reliance on such paradigms may be predictable and reasonable.

Table 6. 1: Educational professionals interviewed in 2003 – for purposes of anonymity titles have been omitted and names have been changed (see table 3.1)

Number	Name	Specialization	Comments
1	Zaid	Senior educational psychologist	Behavioural paradigm: categorize according to behavioural "type"
2	Younnis	Social psychologist/ psychological management	Disability as a "burden" to be "overcome" – help needed to encourage "normality"
3	Riad	Developmental psychology and counselling	Implicit criticisms of system; solution in grassroots ameliorization
4	Hamed	Assessment and testing	Aware of difficulties rather than possibilities; avoids conceptualizing SEN. Basic medical paradigm
5	Dunya	Assistant teacher, SEN	Responsive and open to new ideas yet also resistant to integration/inclusion

Number	Name	Specialization	Comments
6	Hussain	Educational psychology	IQ-based assessments – many SEN students "not fit" to be with other "normal" students.
7	Ishaaq	Psychology specialist	Medical paradigm – measurement is all
8	Samir	Educational psychologist	Behavioural paradigm yet recognizes the inadequacies of categorizations
9	Saif	Social psychologist	Medicalized paradigm: identify and treat SEN
10	Salwa	General psychologist	Psychomedical paradigm; exclusion better than inclusion
11	Loai	Psychological health	Typical medicalized paradigm – sees SEN as a problem needing control
12	Adil	General psychologist	Very hierarchic view of disability: superior to inferior/ "flawed"
13	Yazeed	Social psychologist	Behavioural paradigm: "abnormalities" to be "corrected"
14	Shaima	General psychologist	Holistic pedagogic paradigm
15	Basma	General psychologist	Recognition of current inadequacies and negative effects of labelling. Role for media in education
16	Mubarak	General psychologist	Preference for special schools – physical disability more of a stigma
17	Naader	Educational psychologist	Dislikes "foreign" paradigms; education primarily for "normal" students
18	Maher	Educational psychologist	Resistant to new ideas; psychomedical paradigm; use of tests to "clarify"

(See also table 3.2)

6.1: Dominant conceptualizations of SEN and disability

Within a society where disability and associated concepts are new to education, it is probably the case that for most respondents the paradigm of disability they use is a very personal one. It may be informed by their training and socio-religious ideology, but, essentially, their model is based on personal experience (which may be limited) and personal conceptualizing. Without the concept of disability entering the national educational discourse, or national discourses expressed through media, it is possible that the paradigms will express aspects of personal identity and belief indicative of deeper social patterns. The advantages of examining the concepts of SEN and disability expressed by professionals include the possibility of identifying those national (and wider Arab) patterns which have, so far, not been articulated, and thus establish the parameters within which SEN are conceptualized in Oman.

The purpose of identifying paradigmatic structures of SEN and teacher training (Slee, 1998: 129) is initially to gain a clearer picture, a particularly important process in the context of Oman, which in many ways remains a *terra incognita*. What is interesting about the manner in which paradigms became identifiable is almost a physical collision with earlier concepts; a collision visible in the use of terminology "applied to manage the issue of disability as it collides with the regular education system" (Slee, 1998: 131). Fulcher (1999: 25-26), using Foucault's term "discourse" instead of paradigm, but essentially identifying paradigmatic patterns similar to some of those occurring in these

analysis chapters, distinguishes five discourses: medical, lay, charity, rights, and management or corporate discourses.

The medical discourse/paradigm has been the most visible in the data set, and one which was evident in discussion with all the respondents. Although other paradigms – or sub-paradigms – might be visible, none stand out as powerfully as the medical paradigm, which "through its language of body, patient, help, need, cure, rehabilitation, and its politics that the doctor knows best, excludes a consumer discourse or language of rights, wants and integration" (Fulcher, 1999: 27). The word "consumer" may have the wrong connotations here – a preferable one in the Omani context may be "citizen". Medical discourse can be anti-individualistic to the point of authoritarianism (Pendleton and Hasler, 1983) and excludes by its reliance on knowledgeable specialists (Borsay, 1986: 102).

Slee (1998) considers the medical or "psychomedical" model (Clark, Dyson and Milward, 1998: 157) to dominate SEN theory within a wider post-positivist paradigm. According to Slee and Clark [et at] such a model has three basic characteristics:

(1) "differences between learners were taken to be objectively 'real' and susceptible to investigation using the method of the natural sciences" (Clark, Dyson and Milward, 1998: 157);

(2) differences are identified negatively as deficits or difficulties – Slee sees this as the heart of the psychomedical paradigm, and these features are typical of the medicalized / pathologized paradigm described later in this chapter;

(3) SEN provision is seen as working to cure or at least ameliorate symptoms – a functionalist view.

The construction of SEN as an illness needing treatment, and thus of any teacher training to meet SEN as health care rather than as an educational response (Barton, 1987), was widespread among interviewees. One reason for the growth and maintenance of this model – possibly the dominant view in the wider Omani context – may be the way teacher training works to exclude more complex paradigms. Change or alternative ways of seeing are less thinkable to many because these bring with them a challenge to self-confidence, and call into question a teacher's long-established methodologies for coping. Because socialization into the pedagogic code starts early – as a pupil oneself, then is sustained on a wider social level and confirmed by practice – alternatives are not only awkward to assimilate but they represent a danger to an entire paradigmatic structure. The younger the history of pedagogy – and the pedagogic preparation in Omani teacher training creates limited motivations and skills (Al Belushi, 2003) – the greater the perceived danger offered by changing ways of teaching.

Medicalized constructs of SEN are based on the contrast between health and *normality* with a pathologizing practice of identifying SEN as illness and therefore *abnormal*. The pathologizing of SEN reflects the influence of medical institutions and training.

> Disability [should not] be understood as primarily a medical phenomenon: such a perception reflects the authority and influence of the medical profession and the extent to which its ideas penetrate and inform everyday and professional discourses on disability. (Fulcher, 1999: 21)

One of the most striking similarities across the data sets is the respondents' pessimism regarding resources, facilities and services. Students with SEN were seen by some respondents as pathologized rather than as whole, complex individuals with educational and social potential. It is easier to cope with problems by falling back on diagnosing, labelling and then categorizing the result (Kirk, 1975: 39); this may particularly be the case in developing countries with a limited reservoir of diagnostic tools or alternative explanations. Optimism seems to be rare – and it might be suggested that optimism is an important ingredient for teacher training.

One of the results of a pathologizing paradigm can be to abnegate personal and professional responsibility: to simplify a complex rhizome structure into categories which can be handled. To create a medicalized paradigm and see SEN as an illness minimizes the role of the educator and SEN specialist, reducing both to professionals who serve a narrow category rather than a complex whole.

The psychological sub-paradigm is, in most important ways, very similar to the medical paradigm of SEN, and a predictably identifiable set of concepts given that so many respondents were trained within the field of psychology or were working within psychology departments which framed the processes by which SEN were to be identified,

classified and catered for. Interestingly, perhaps because of the concentration on mental rather than physical disablement, the psychological sub-paradigm may tend to dismiss certain SENs as *treatable* only outside the system, in special schools like the three described in chapter 5. Thus this sub-paradigm creates another and different system of exclusion. Those psychologized theories of development visible in Oman have their counterparts in the UK during the second half of the Twentieth century (Billington, 2000: 24), particularly as a result of the power relations of what Billington calls governmentality (ibid: 23), and surely linked to the growth in the medical and psychological professions and their associated discourses, as well as institutions such as the National Health Service. The effect is one of socio-political uniformity (Foucault, 1977).

> [T]he identification and pathologization of children whose very being is considered unreasonable: children who are allocated a social disability in whatever form, physical, mental or emotional. It is through the discourses which permeate institutions such as Education, Health and Social Services that attacks can be organized against children's resistance to the power of reason … . Such institutions validate the allocation of pathologies as part of the processes of governmentality. (Billington, 2000: 24)

The psychological paradigm is itself a sub-paradigm of what might be crudely labelled behaviourism. This dissolves SEN and teacher training into the management of what might be seen as "deviant" responses, hoping to change such behaviour to make it more acceptable within the education system as a whole.

What should be noted overall, and not just in the context of the Omani respondents, but also in terms of teaching and teacher training in general, is that the different

paradigm/sub-paradigms dominating the academic understanding of SEN do not occur in discrete time periods, or only amongst certain people in certain areas. What seems to occur is that the paradigms and their sub-paradigms are mixed together in the responses: this matches with Poplin's (1988a) suggestion that the discrete conceptualizing of SEN paradigms occurs academically rather than pedagogically, and that, even then, there may be no distinct chronology.

Thus the overall pathologizing medicalized paradigm contains perhaps three sub-paradigms: the more purely medical; the psychological and the closely associated behavioural paradigms. Each, in its way, resolves bad science into poor practice.

6.2: The medical paradigm pathologizing special needs – "science slips silently away" (Billington, 2000: 25)

Medical paradigms which draw on "symptomology and medical model assumptions" (Poplin, 1988a: 395) are at the heart of the philosophical approach of many respondents. For the purposes of this research a distinction between *medicalized* and *pathologized* will be made – though, in general, the latter term is used more widely (Billington, 2000). This *medical model* locates difficulties in the student.

> [The medical model is] a professional orientation which is highly focussed on pathology, not normalcy, on sickness, not wellbeing, on the nature and the aetiology of the presenting problem itself, not on the individual who has the problem, on dealing with the specific pathology in a centred way not on the social or ecosystem which surrounds the problem, that is, the patient, his or her family, social and financial circumstances, values and attitudes. (Bailey, 1998: 49)

Bailey's use of the word "problem" is interesting: clearly he still is ambivalent about its location and even meaning, and it is similar conceptually to the way Frostig (1976) identifies SEN as problematic – though she also believes that "labelling … should be discouraged" (Frostig, 1976: 29). *Medicalized* in the context of this analysis is used to define a whole range of practices, ideas and terminologies that apply to SEN but are modelled on medical paradigms: for example, the use of psychiatric and other diagnostic tests to determine SEN (Kirk, 1974; Kirk et al, 1968) or the use of the phrases such as "suffering from disability". Within this wide medical paradigm, there exists a more specific act of pathologization, where SEN is perceived as an illness and labelled as such which may, sometimes, with certain appropriate treatments, be cured; for those SENs which are not curable there may only be exclusion from education. Pathologization is thus not so much an exercise of diagnosis, as an exercise of power – a characteristic of authoritarianism (Pendleton and Hasler, 1983).

> Whilst [pathologizing paradigms] offer opportunities for both regulation and resistance … they have developed in order to serve the interests, not necessarily of science, but of those whose power allows them to make claims to "fact, truth and reason". It is not always the quest for fact and truth which determines scientific practices … but the ownership of reason and its partnership with economic powers and governmentality. In such practices, science slips silently away. (Billington, 2000: 25)

There are advantages to be gained by using a simple paradigm that is clear and readily understood – a paradigm of physical health. Either someone is well (without a disease or condition producing symptoms that limit or constrain physical or mental potential) or they are ill. This is a divide seen as acceptable by some, an easy way to fit students into categories. There is also a sense that a *medicalized* or *pathologized* paradigm is a

comfortable one for many respondents. Alternatives, which may involve changing ways of perceiving the world, are seen as too radical.

Maher (interviewed 2003) illustrates a typical pathologization of disability generally and SEN in particular: he evinces no interest whatever in a concept such as integration – a concept linked to behaviourist (Zimmerman and Zimmerman, 1970: 275) and later paradigms that seek to replace the pathology of isolation. However Maher's explicit resistance to new ideas suggests more than a lack of awareness, perhaps a resistance to increasing that awareness.

> I really have no detailed idea about how special education is studied – that is because we are not basically training or teaching any such subjects … if an opportunity arises and SE sees the light, we can [*hesitation – dismissive tone*] train [teachers] in this new category. (Maher, interviewed 2003)

This response is couched as reaction rather than either thoughtful development or principle; Maher seems aware of himself as antagonist in terms of advocacy for SEN: the interview may have driven him into reaction, rather than encouraging him towards constructive supposition. On the other hand, facing an interviewer may have allowed him to express himself more clearly and assertively. He suggests that including SEN as a teacher training subject is hardly relevant, unless a particular trainee wishes to specialize; Maher's model of education might suggest an active resistance to alternative ideas.

> As regards integration and segregation, we also have no ideas about [these concepts], and we don't inquire about them, or put them in our questionnaires. (Maher, interviewed 2003)

Resistance merges here into implicit discomfort and then downright rejection. Maher suggests that he does not want to inquire, to think about different issues, which is why the reductionism of the medical model is such a benefit. This is reflected in his use of language, with a clear division between *normal* and *deviant* – a polarity frequently employed by respondents: those *like us* are allowed a positive identity; those *unlike* enjoy a negative or denied identity.

> Normal students are important … [because] they can be educated, we all have been educated, before and as teachers. (Maher, interviewed 2003)

Although Maher seems, at times, to evince a more positive attitude to SEN and the development of an appropriate national curriculum, this is always undercut by what might be called a subtle, but deep form of rejection.

> Social psychology links the person with society … so when we raise [the matter of SEN curriculum] we should want the potential student to have no points of weakness [since] we cannot get involved with such points. (Maher, 2003)

Maher admits problems, implicitly with the adequacy of his own paradigm, but actively draws back from any involvement that might develop critical political links. The more difficult the student, the more they display "weakness", the more time they take up and thus the more problems they create. Separation is the subtext here; isolation a "cure" for weakness.

6.2.1: The medical paradigm – education or control?

Pendleton and Hasler (1983) describe the working of the medical paradigm as a method of control: "diagnosis" of SEN, the hub of identification, is less about the education, liberation and empowerment of students with SEN and more about the strengthening of the teacher's authority. Pedagogy is management not enlightenment. Dunya evinces a certain preference for what she calls the "handling and control" of certain types of SEN students, and overall "diagnosis", a medicalized mode of identification which uses diagnosis as a method. Those with SEN pose a problem of contamination.

> [Having a blind child in a class] affects the level of [another child] who will imitate the blind child, and behave like them. (Dunya, 2003)

Segregation is clearly an important method for Dunya in preventing such contamination, a contamination which may represent a deeper fear that social unity is somehow compromised by difference: "we are an Omani community" she says, defining this as something apart from those who have SEN. Yet, simultaneously, she evinces a certain conceptual incoherence, when she adds "what does 'normal' mean exactly?" Such a question, in other circumstances, might suggest openness to difference. In Dunya's case the ideological context of her previous comments suggests that she is not seeking to weaken or dismiss the notion of "normal", but rather to strengthen it with the bias of national identity, and within an overall paradigm of SEN provision that pathologizes disablement. Samir (interviewed 2003) suggests diagnosis should lead to planned *treatment* – especially important since he believes disablement is increasing.

> [The current policy is too] random, it is not centred or controlled, [it is] hoped that further study will improve [the situation] because disablement is on the increase – the percentage here is around 13%, which I feel is a high percentage. We must control [the situation]. (Samir, interviewed 2003)

Thus teacher training should incorporate SEN because the numbers of disabled students are "on the increase" – a clear reaction, but one driven by a sense of losing control and being overtaken by events. There may be a parallel in the UK in the media discourses (Fowler, 1993) associated with refugees whose presence becomes a *threatening tide* which *overwhelms*. There is an element of moral panic rather than philosophical development in Samir's responses, though he may not quite see those with SEN as folk devils (Cohen, 2002: x).

> How [do teachers] deal with … students with learning difficulties, which have, in my opinion, become a particular phenomenon? The teachers have an excessive number of [such] students. (Samir, interviewed 2003)

Samir perceives SEN as a creeping threat, another set of problems linked to modernity that must be dealt with, if grudgingly. Samir seems to feel that in some way modern perceptions may even be exaggerating the phenomenon of SEN, and that the people who consequently suffer are the teachers. *Problems* must be handled, though not necessarily resolved.

> [These] problems [in the classroom] especially if they lead to inappropriate and bad behaviour must be handled and … dealt with. (Samir, interviewed 2003)

SEN should be categorized effectively so that disabled students can be adequately *handled*. The implicit suggestion here is control rather than education – a paradigm similar to the one which employs exclusion as a method of control in UK schools.

One solution to this increase in the incidence of SEN, according to Saif (interviewed 2003) is better identification.

> Who are those with special needs? We [should] start with definitions – who are those with SEN? We need to identify them from the lowest to the highest level. We need people … to discover their cases quickly so that we can address their cases quickly, and correct them quickly. (Saif, interviewed 2003)

Identification, in this sense, almost seems an end in itself – perhaps not too unlike early identification in UK policy (DfES, 2004); define and identify seem to be reasons in themselves, rather than routes to helping those with SEN benefit from education. In this case, Saif may be suggesting some kind of preventative medical work, which he sees as equally important to the funding of SEN centres and support for those with SEN – though he prefixes his comments with a denial of too great a medicalization: "awareness, instruction, not a medical issue", which he uses to refer to and describe a limited social service centre he says is being considered. When he thinks of an anecdotal evidence of his own views he chooses a typical medical example.

> We gave … appropriate advice and they went to Khoula Hospital … [where] they conducted an operation … and after six months she was walking normally … she would not have married otherwise, but now she is a normal healthy person. (Saif, interviewed 2003)

In this paradigm, normal is equated with the healthy, those who have been cured of their disablement – and further, it is equated with marriageability, ability and willingness to marry which are important considerations in Omani society. If only, the implicit lesson runs, all SEN could be similarly dealt with; if only normal healthiness could be the measure.

6.2.2: The medical paradigm – diagnosis and treatment

Saif evinces many of the contradictions visible among the respondents: in some ways he is himself an example of the confusion of those caught between different – even potentially contradictory – paradigms. As a senior member of staff at a TTC it would seem he should have created some kind of workable model for himself and his students, but, perhaps because of his heightened awareness of forthcoming change he inhabits a state of perceptive disequilibrium: at first he delivers a medicalized conceptualization of SEN, even if in Saif's case this is hidden behind the use of specific vocabulary. Health is opposed to disability; disability is equated with problems at birth; birth can either be *normal* or problematic and therefore lead to disablement; psychological problems link to deterioration in health, all under the umbrella term of disablement/SEN. Saif states that "SEN care is not a medical issue", but follows this assertion with a statement that *treatment* for disablement in general should be available, possible or preferably, *in utero*.

> In medicine they can treat the foetus in the womb … modern science has now improved where an early identification before and after birth, helping thus to transform that person into a normal state, a proper body, instead of allowing the handicapped to become a symbol and [personal identity]. … SEN care is not a medical issue because things can be done [before birth]. (Saif, interviewed 2003)

In Omani society where there are heightened dilemmas regarding congenital and medical issues Saif's response is understandable. The continued high incidence of congenital disabilities may be part of the reason for the dominance in Oman of the medicalized model. But there is more to Saif's model of SEN than a preference that it be *treated* or prevented before birth. Here is, potentially, an embryonic programme of eugenics, not only to prevent the presence of disablement within a society, but, at a deeper level, to prevent the growth of some kind of alternative identity, in which the disabled may be indulged and spoiled. The similarity to Samir's (interviewed 2003) suspicion and discomfort is considerable. Changes in meeting SEN could be based on better preventative medical work, which means, in real terms, that Saif's educational universe is constructed around a healthy model where any variation is not just unfortunate, but rather an unwanted, even threatening ideological challenge. This is also visible in Adil's (interviewed 2003) use of the word "diagnosis" – diagnostic process Adil sees as the foundation, and in some cases the extent of proper SEN provision; a typical example of a medicalized paradigm.

> Diagnosis is … a big problem. Without diagnosis by trained people [there is] a big problem. Diagnosis is a very important factor. … There should be a [diagnostic] course [to identify those with] learning difficulties … a course on measurements to diagnose learning difficulties. (Adil, interviewed 2003)

He considers SEN to be an illness or affliction which, with appropriate "awareness" and "measurement" can be diagnosed and thus dealt with: Adil is not clear about what diagnosis actually would lead to, but there is a sense that once the illness is laid bare then

the education system can more effectively distance itself from contamination. Although Saif talks about inclusion, the overall context of the interview is one in which those with SEN are very different to those without identifiable disablement.

> If we compare between the normal kid and those of special needs we will find a big difference … the disabled child needs to be trained in basic daily skills … the category [of SEN] is deprived from dealing with others and as a result … there will be no common language, even sign language makes things worse since we don't, as normal people, understand or use it. (Saif, interviewed 2003)

For Saif there is a barrier to communication, which, in essence, is the barrier of difference. He appears to invoke this barrier and wish to retreat behind it; it is his protection against having to include those with SEN in his pedagogy. Those with SEN are too alien to allow for a meaningful comparison between a disabled child and a child "like us".

This pathologizing and ideological quarantining can be contrasted with Hussain (interviewed 2003), who acknowledges that diagnosis "may cause trouble", and lead to test after test (he mentions a raft of 18 tests leading to a conclusion that a student is a "slow learner"). This does suggest that Hussain is more complex than Saif in his appreciation of SEN – that is, has a model of SEN provision that is philosophically open to adaptation. His conception of training teachers in SEN is one in which testing and diagnosis go hand in hand before any curricular activities.

> I conducted this year [2003] two workshops, all special education teachers were trained [in the procedure of] fourteen diagnostic exams and two intelligence tests,

> and then twelve in mathematics and two in reading … the course lasted a week, and I gave 'social supervisors' a course in all diagnostic tests. (Hussain, interviewed 2003)

Hussain may be aware of diagnostic insufficiency, but seems to see testing extending throughout the system, even to "normal students". The test seems to be, for Hussain, a simple way of identifying the problem, allowing the appropriate *cure* to take place.

> A kid came to me, his IQ was 30, they had put him in a normal school, so then I checked him out and made intelligence tests and a programme for him over four months, and now the kid has become normal. (Hussain, interviewed 2003)

He blames problems of diagnostic tests on non-Omani workers who do not know the appropriate Arabic diagnostic terms, or whose "accents … cause trouble for the child" (Hussain, interviewed 2003). He has a model of quarantining which is all his own, despite his experience of normalizing a student with a four month programme.

> Learning difficulties, most slow learner[s] [and SEN students are] not fit to be with normal students [or work within] a normal programme. (Hussain, interviewed 2003)

Here pathologization is implicitly the paradigmatic choice, and similar again to Saif and Samir (interviewed 2003). When diagnosis is wrong and a "normal" student is diagnosed as having a SEN, then Hussain feels the unfairness of misdiagnosis keenly.

> The problem is that [when] the diagnosis is wrong, if they say the child is mentally retarded when this is quite unfair … [because] the kid is normal and then he gets sent along with all those mentally retarded [children]. (Hussain, 2003)

Although later he states that "disability is not shame" for him it clearly is shameful if a normal student is lumped along with the disabled by one of his favoured tests. The implicit horror in his statement suggests Hussain fears what the ideas driving SEN might do in terms of pedagogic contamination. The beauty of a medical paradigm in meeting SEN is that it allows teachers, teacher trainers and policy makers to believe that, by testing and placing students in appropriate categories, they are doing the scientifically valid thing – here is a clear process which, like the diagnosis of a broken leg, is unquestionable. According to Hussain, the places where certain disabilities such as deafness and paraplegia are to be "treated" are only at the Ibn Sina psychiatric centre and the University Hospital. Where the medical paradigm helps is in drawing up a clear set of boundaries which maintain the current exclusive power relationships (Bernstein, 2000: 53); the extant system is unquestioned, and the stronger the training for testing and diagnosis, by those whose Arabic is of a suitably high standard, the less likely that such a shameful occurrence such as labelling a "normal" child as "educationally subnormal" will occur. The role of language here is thus to valorize and recognize oppression, a frequent phenomenon for the disabled (Christensen, 1996: 63).

Zaid (interviewed 2003), who might be expected to present a more medicalized or psychomedicalized model, does so implicitly rather than explicitly: a certain level of pathologization is suggested through using phrases such as "treat cases" rather than "educate students"; those with SEN are identified by IQ tests. This implicit pathologization is very widespread, perhaps because it is an easy model to apply. Strictly speaking, Zaid seems to express a preference for the behaviourist paradigm – he had

recently added three new courses in behavioural psychology – but as Poplin (1988a) points out, the nature of the pathologization is similar, despite the attempt to inject what Zaid feels is modern science.

> We call them challenged students, behavioural challenges which include learning disabilities and mental disabilities, divided [into groups in order to] simplify; we use the American scientific names, we don't use labels like "lunatic" [مجنون] ... we are teaching [according to] those individual differences, explaining there are people with special needs, and we try to use modern terminology, we don't say "disabled" [معاق]. (Zaid, interviewed 2003)

However much he struggles to avoid pejorative language and labelling and tries to appear modern, what stands out is that those with SEN remain an unnatural out-group whom Zaid wishes to deal with appropriately. Zaid is clearly worried by the effects testing may have, and in this sense is aware that a medicalized approach, however scientific, does have its weaknesses. But while he acknowledges the problem of identifying students' "levels" and thus labelling them for the remainder of their school careers, he tantalizingly adds "I take this [flaw in the testing] to be its weakness and its strength". Zaid explicitly recognizes the damage done by testing as it supposedly identifies and thus stigmatizes, but refuses to see the medicalized approach as flawed by this reductionism (Poplin, 1988a: 395). The "strange and terrible cases" are, logically according to Younnis's medicalized paradigm, beyond help: "you will never treat them" (Younnis, interviewed 2003). In some cases SEN is pathologized by its linkage with psychology rather than pedagogy – Younnis sees this as a prerequisite to SEN being studied at all, with a need to "promote [the psychological approach to SEN] and identify problems" (Younnis,

interviewed 2003). Though, interestingly, Younnis is aware that teacher trainees are not convinced that a psychology-based curriculum can help train them to meet SEN.

Saif's perception of disablement and health as opposites and Samir's (interviewed 2003) analysis leading from diagnosis to treatment, are clearly medicalized approaches to SEN reflected by the pseudo-scientific division of disablement according to behavioural types: *behavioural change* is differentiated from *disablement* and *learning difficulties*, suggesting a hierarchy of educational abilities or responsiveness, where SEN, or at least an aspect of SEN, is considered somehow as an immutable core which education cannot change and for which education should not be changed. It is curious to note that pedagogy is perceived by Zaid (interviewed 2003), a key member of the teacher training team, not as a practice of encouraging and developing individual potential, but rather as psycho-sociological engineering. Samir displays a similar paradigm, where the disabled are "a deprived category of people" (Samir, interviewed 2003). This is always going to be a tension with pedagogic philosophy which expresses deeper social and political anxieties. Zaid's concept of teacher training reflects this anxiety – and, paradoxically, denies it. This denial, similar in tone to Yazeed's, is clear in his scientific detachment, rationalizing SEN into those students who need to be treated, rather than making any deeper causational linkages.

6.2.3: The medical paradigm – a spectrum of pathology

Although the medical paradigm may seem to be straightforward – an approach modelled on diagnosis and treatment – there is a range, a spectrum of pathologizing perceivable

within this data set. Like the other two major paradigms the medical paradigm is evident across the data set, at its mildest with the implicit approach to SEN as a pathology to be treated. However, when pathologizing becomes explicit, the crudity of the association can be shocking: Mubarak, despite his wider than usual application of the category *normal*, uses the word "disease" [مرض] to lump together different SENs, which he labels "hearing and visual and mental *diseases*" (Mubarak, interviewed 2003: researcher's italics). He sees those students with SEN as suffering, and the closest analogy might be with an infection of some sort when he uses the adjectives light, medium and severe for mental disability. His discussion concentrates on those with paraplegia, a specific and visible set of SENs, which Mubarak feels is too extreme for mainstream academic inclusion. Visibility suggests a more profound disablement, much as more blood in an emergency ward suggests a worse injury.

Yazeed (interviewed 2003) sees SEN as combining a mixed medical and behavioural paradigm: training should be corrective, and SEN programmes would work best if they used medical intervention as a first resource to deal with disablement in whatever forms it presents, with teachers "and other parties too [who are] involved in treatment" (Yazeed, interviewed 2003). Yazeed presents the medicalized paradigm in a simple though slightly adapted form, where young people with disablements are not to be considered primarily as clients of an education programme, but rather primarily as sick people, patients in need of treatment who appear on a spectrum of severity leading from *mild* to *extreme*: teachers are only part of a team in the sense that the SEN may be best identified by them; the social workers have a linking role from classroom to hospital, where doctors treat

disablement, "using diagnostic tests, diagnosis determining treatment, especially when it is severe"(Yazeed, interviewed 2003).

> [Social evaluative] factors are helpful in the diagnosis process, and the man who undertakes this diagnostic task needs to be qualified [since] … we can only determine the treatment based on the diagnosis. Diagnosis should be done by a team which has no particular specialization, as the [linked] problems involve medical, social, educational and psychological dimensions. … It is, all in all, very much a scientific programme, [with] treatment for each level [of disability]. If we want to see the idea of special needs or children with special needs a success, we should stick to this scientific programme. (Yazeed, interviewed 2003)

If those with SEN are to be treated like other children, then this can only happen once the medicalized paradigm has generated the appropriate categories, recognizing various "levels of severity" (Yazeed, interviewed 2003) and diagnosis has tested and supported the validity of these boundaries – and power has been appropriately exercised (Bernstein, 2000: 5). Although Yazeed goes on to suggest that SENs are in need of extensive academic study and a better understanding amongst members of the educational community, his perception of SEN is of a series of physical and mental inadequacies that determine educational inadequacies: the pathologized model is here presented as a model that denies any reason to consider disablement as a need to be met by educational resources. Yazeed offers what seems a rather paradoxical approach to SEN, recognizing the need for much greater research and awareness, but this is simply a call for better "treatment" according to the spectrum of severity outside or alongside the educational system. Thus there appear to be stages of awareness, mirroring the severity spectrum, each needing a deeper and more comprehensive revision of the dominant guiding paradigm, and each one more difficult to adopt.

Where there is an attempt to update pedagogy to include SEN and notions of disability and difference there also is a struggle to create a working and logical model of practice. Younnis (interviewed 2003) moves towards an integrated concept that locates a student's needs within the classroom rather than within a surgery, but does so by bifurcating classroom needs into "attention/instruction" and education – the teacher, for those with SEN, is replaced by a "guide [recognizing the] severest and mildest [levels of disablement]" (Younnis, interviewed 2003). What is developed is a pedagogic philosophy that perceives a range of needs constrained by the application of a medicalized model of disablement.

Where a respondent is aware of SEN/disablement terminology, the strength of the spectrum of what is and what is not educable creates a reinterpretation of certain words. Inclusion and exclusion are words used surprisingly infrequently, and often defensively or, as with Naader (interviewed 2003), in a confused manner. The strength of a medicalized perception of disablement means that new concepts are made ideologically available by retrogressive interpretation – according to the perceived severity of disablement. Ishaaq (interviewed 2003) senses that "some [SEN] are easily treated" and thus worthy of inclusion; "others offer difficulties of treatment. They are more [severe]" and their severity determines the likeliness of their exclusion from the classroom. He sees medical and psychological help in terms of monitoring progress by students as the key to meeting SEN. If, as he suggests, he sees the classroom as necessarily mirroring the wider social world, then his responses indicate that rather than using education as an instrument

for social change, it should be required that education reflect social realities. Such an attitude is vulnerable to socio-political naïveté and even conservatism, and Ishaaq sees change only within the existing model, that, in general, everything is more or less functioning well because "the general condition of the country is good and no particular problems show themselves" (Ishaaq, interviewed 2003). This approach to pedagogy may be partly due to, or at least strengthened by the way education policy is communicated (described in chapter 7.5.1).

The most common paradigms are those most easily understood and applied: Naader uses the idea of the hierarchy of health, from those severely to those mildly "afflicted by SEN" to those considered "flawless" (Naader, interviewed 2003). Even education itself is medicalized – it is given in appropriately incremental doses. Clearly there are other models of the world functioning simultaneously, particularly those which identify *us* (the normal, the healthy) and *them* (the subnormal or deviant, and unhealthy). Naader is typical in his balance of these, one paradigm sitting neatly within the other, and satisfied by the rationale that, "any policy must be designed for the benefit of the majority" (Naader, interviewed 2003).

6.3: The psychological paradigm - a hierarchy of SEN

The psychological paradigm, or psychological process model (Poplin, 1988a: 391), does something very similar to the medical paradigm already examined: it introduces a reductionist conceptionalization of SEN, based on testing, analysis and "appropriate" treatment or streaming – or even exclusion (Kirk et al, 1968). The psychological

paradigm is of particular importance in terms of teacher training in Oman mainly because departments of psychology and psychologists in general occupy a crucial role in teacher training, and because pedagogy throughout the Sultanate is founded upon principles interpreted by such professionals. Many were trained either in the 1960s or by those deeply influenced by those models of child development influential in the 1960s. For example, the Marianne Frostig test of visual perception is used (Frostig et al, 1963), not in the context of a wider philosophy which understands the limits of such testing, but rather as an ultimate and certain measure of a child's performance.

Out of the 18 key respondents, 16 are trained psychologists. Their interpretation of teacher training is one based not on appropriate collaboration but rather on a deep establishment of *normality* or *normalcy*. SEN can thus be expected to be reduced to those psychological explanations most easily and frequently articulated by psychologists who may not be aware of the subtle shifts and realignments conceptualizing SEN since their own graduations.

One of the results of a pathologizing paradigm of SEN can be the abnegation of personal and professional responsibilities – both by teacher trainers, and, thus by teachers: to simplify the complex rhizome structure of human life, of school students and, most specifically of those with SEN into categories which can be handled (Reed and Watson, 1994). The reductionism represented by the psychomedical paradigm may well make life easier for those directly involved in SEN, but it presents a significant shift away from admitting complexity to preferring simplicity.

> [The reductionist fallacy means] (1) erroneously believing (a) that a complex whole is nothing but, or identical with, its parts and causes and/or (b) that a complex whole can be entirely explained in terms of the description of its parts and causes. … (2) The error of explaining a phenomena and regarding its explanation as being real rather than the phenomenon being explained. (Poplin, 1988a: 394)

To create a medicalized paradigm and to see SEN as an illness reduces the role of the educator and SEN specialist. This is a paradigm which does not help clarify the Omani situation, but rather obfuscates, allowing the picture to degenerate into error-prone, distortions (Holden, 1990).

Loai displays the usual professional qualms about certain categories such as "mental retardation".

> I don't want to talk about US terminology … I don't want to use the phrase 'mental retardation' [تخلف عقلي] … there is a mental retardation but better considered as a dated expression. If I have a son today, who suffers from a form of mental retardation, thanks to visual and auditory aides today, and thanks to the computer, we can enhance his memory and thus his level of intelligence … such intelligence may not be an inherent one, but an acquired intelligence which can be further developed through exercise and give the child the chance to live a normal life, and thus we see that the disability will recede. (Loai, interviewed 2003)

Loai, like many interviewees, displays a fascinating mixture of sensitivity and confusion. He understands, implicitly, the nature of the reductionist fallacy that identifies a child according to a label, and thus gives some kind of reality to that label of "mental retardation". But his faith in technology, and the way the old opposition of *normal* and *disabled* recurs, patterns his perspectives. While categories may not be fixed for Loai, their fluidity depends on redefinition within a conservative, psychologized paradigm. His

comments displace crude categorization into a psychological hierarchy which runs from "normal and flawless" to "abnormal" and "complete disability" (Loai, interviewed 2003). Yet through all this he refuses to place the label of problem causer on either the child or the teacher.

> [The problem] is a not just matter of teacher failure or student failure or a failure of the curriculum teacher, it is a joint problem, that's where the problem exists. (Loai, interviewed 2003)

His identification of widespread responsibility, however, fails to recognize that one problem may be caused by the paradigm he prefers. Loai indicates a curious combination of psychological and aesthetic categorization: "flawless" is an adjective most frequently used either for a gem, a work of art or an attractively fitting argument; no person can ever be "flawless", yet this is an allowed misperception created quite possibly because any SEN is seen as a flaw.

6.3.1: Deviance – negatives in the psychological paradigm

One result of any hierarchy – social, political, psychological or pedagogical – is that those relegated to inferior positions are liable to be measured as what they are *not* rather than what they are. This negative (the socially excluded are an example) then aggregates morally negative qualities, deviances which most often are defined in terms of exclusion from the social consensus – criminality (Cohen, 2002). Hierarchical description also exaggerates, further defining the negatives. Extremes suffer distortion by virtue of the manner in which they come to define each other in negative terms.

> The normal and flawless [are] one side then the disabled and the complete disability … the worst are [those with] flaws, the imperfect. (Loai, interviewed 2003)

This categorization drives apart those with and those without SEN – the perfect and the flawed or imperfect, an exaggeration which negatively defines and locates disability as, at best, biological deviance. Sometimes, Loai surmises, disabled students' performances may be "enhanced [so that] their disabilities are made to recede" (Loai, interviewed 2003) through appropriate psychological treatment. Presumably in this case biological deviance can be ameliorated – even if only passively by slotting it into a clarifying hierarchy. "Appropriate [psychological] training [helps] measurement and classification" (Adil, interviewed 2003) is seen as a way to fit those with SEN into a sliding hierarchy from slight to more serious categories. Adil uses the classification he deems appropriate to teacher training, and in this there can be no integration or inclusion of those with SEN – deviance denies such concepts. Quite simply "there will be no common language" between different levels, between those with SEN and "normal students [who are] superior" (Adil, interviewed 2003). Explicitly, Adil admits that the courses in educational health and psychology only "deal with normal people" – teacher training is not there to serve those teachers wishing to understand SEN better. His is the most explicitly exclusionist paradigm, yet one which groans at the seams at it tries to adapt: there is a sense that the disjunction between how some respondents model their professional world, and the words and ideas they use to model it, and how they fit themselves into that modelling – as agent – is always present in some form.

Maher (interviewed, 2003) advances and elaborates this paradigm, using a word that is only implicit in Loai's interview – "deviation".

> Through our study of educational psychology we noticed a difference in the education process – that is for the normal students, we don't talk about the deviations [الانحرافات] which we notice in some slow-learning students. (Maher, interviewed 2003)

Deviation, in Maher's paradigm, occasionally presents among some slow-learners: presumably, deviation is used to demarcate the lowest, or least educable level, a level determined by the application of tests. Possibly any awkwardness, or someone who does not fit easily within the system as designed and applied by Maher and his colleagues, will be *deviant*. Deviance is a dangerous conception, since it suggests a category resistant to, or outside the conceptualization of, the designating authority: it is a political, not a psychological, and never a purely moral designation. Maher considers important "the use of tests … especially mental tests … [to] clarify" the demarcation between what is deviant (abnormal) and what is not. What is actually being described goes beyond the reductionism of the psychological paradigm; the psychological process and IQ testing are part of the psychological paradigm (Kephart, 1960) but these tests apply directly to the reinforcement of academic goals.

> The student is like white piece of paper, he is raw material, and if the teacher is not aware of his [academic] potentials … deviations will increase. (Maher, interviewed 2003)

The idea of the student as *tabula rasa* – a material to be moulded by the teacher and the educational system – is challenged when the student actively or passively rejects the moulding: then the student is *deviant*. For all Maher's asserted support for positive policy changes to meet SEN, his educational paradigm works to identify the breadth of adaptability; beyond its boundaries lies unadaptable deviance, which has no place in educational provision.

Salwa considers the use of psychological testing to be the prime tool in SEN classification.

> School managers should contact the [appropriate psychology department regarding the mentally disabled] to seek our assistance as psychologists … we should do the [standard] intelligence test first to know their intelligence percentage, and [this will help us] later distribute them to the [relevant] SEN organizations. (Salwa, interviewed 2003)

Testing exists to classify and then allocate those with SEN to their appropriate academic niches. This reliance on a supposedly independent, objective and reliable system of classification is common: Hussain (interviewed 2003) sees other Arab models as useful, categorizing SEN according to IQ and motor tests; this testing would be reinforced by "psychological supervisors". Hussain's preference for testing is not conceived of as one helpful tool among many, but rather as a necessary system of absolute classification.

> [In my country] we noticed after necessary tests that some students are suffering mental retardation, problems of deafness, visual problems, slow-learning difficulties, then after diagnosis we knew the difference between slow-learners and learning difficulties … those who are 89% can be with normal children. (Hussain, interviewed 2003)

89% of what, and how such a percentage is reached, or if it is meaningful are questions that reflect the confusion at the heart of categorization of intelligence. Nevertheless, IQ tests become a gatekeeper for academic access and acceptability, defining the categories used to facilitate a particular paradigm of SEN provision. Hussain may reflect current practice, and accept testing as guaranteeing his own place within a system. His preference may be a reflection of his sense of the unassailability of the dominant paradigm – and of his own unassailability as a contributor and participant to that paradigm. Testing or assessment may have a role with all educational processes, but there is a particular relationship with those with SEN "who become the subjects of a uniquely rigorous and concentrated professional 'gaze'" (McDonnell, 2000: 13). Testing is a unique form of what Foucault (1975) calls "surveillance" – a term which, with the context of French culture, has a particularly unpleasant and controlling element determined by memories of occupation. A test is where discourse becomes established, and tests are driven and controlled by those professionals who begin to see those tests as integral to the reality of SEN – because they define – often easily – both the student and the professional's attitude toward the student. That psychology as a practice within teacher training introduces a systematic test-based methodology is made clear when Hussain, without commenting, itemises the "training in SEN [which uses] 14 diagnostic exams, 2 intelligence exams, and 12 in mathematics and reading". Clearly the training of a teacher in meeting SEN in the classroom draws a line between mainstream and SEN curricula, and stresses diagnosis and IQ classification as classroom tools. Hussain wants to extend

the capacity to deploy intelligence and psychological testing training to all teacher trainees, both at BA and MA levels – whether or not they are specializing in SEN.

Mubarak (interviewed 2003) sees in-service training for SEN as consisting of "practical psychological guidance", while maintaining a very wide conceptualization of normal, which shifts exclusive boundaries.

> We concluded that the slow-learning child is a normal child in terms of general capabilities, but he or she for some reason suffers from learning difficulties, which may be [to do with] hearing or sight or due to social or psychological factors. (Mubarak, interviewed 2003)

But again there is a strange bifurcation between psychological and motor disabilities, which classes the latter as somehow more serious, more deviant and less acceptable than the former. The psychological paradigm works, in these cases, with some other, perhaps deeper preference which links visibility with negativity.

> Should [the imagined motor-disabled child Fatma] have learning difficulties [then she can] remain in her class … [but] if she suffers mobility difficulties her case will then prove more difficult, as this child tries to deal with other children, in their mobility, playing, she will have [problems]. Physical deviations are problems. I think the mobility difficulties require segregation in a separate school despite [current concepts of] 'social rehabilitation' … learning difficulties [on the other hand] are not a serious problem and can be solved. (Mubarak, interviewed 2003)

There is another concern expressed by Mubarak about teacher care of the motor disabled child being of a kind which is more demanding and more specialized, but this only comes at the end of an extensive argument that foregrounds the *visible* aspects of disability as somehow more problematic in a classroom. The existence of mobility aids such as

callipers highlight the disability, and exaggerate Mubarak's fears – such aids are visible examples of deviancy. Here the psychological paradigm has been adapted, and the resulting conceptualization of SEN is to create a boundary between what is *physically* possible in a classroom and what may cause problems – for the teacher, for the other children, and finally for the disabled child. It is interesting how often the child is injected into the paradigm as an afterthought. Visibility increases severity and deviance – appearance, it seems for Mubarak, is all.

6.4: Behaviourism: the "ratomorphic" view of man (Koestler, 1973)

Behaviourist approaches were evident as a distinct sub-paradigm of psychomedical reductionism within the data set, often working with the other paradigms. Certain interviewees displayed a significant interest in adapting and changing the behaviour of those with certain SEN – behavioural change would be an end in itself; of benefit to teachers, other students, and the pedagogic system, yet of little use to those with SEN.

> Some are difficult [so] training [of those students with SEN] should be corrective … some kids with SEN show anomalous behaviour [and do not demonstrate] personal or social competency. (Yazeed, interviewed 2003)

Yazeed sees SEN teacher training to be less about curing (the psychomedical paradigm) and more about adjusting external behaviour to make it fit with the system as it currently exists. In the Omani context this variation on the behaviourist analysis occurs in a significant part of the data set.

Koestler's dismissal of behaviourism as "ratomorphic" reductionism (Koestler, 1973) may be extreme, but it shows that an attention to behavioural deficits can easily become an end in itself. Instead of the psychological paradigm's interest in testing and streaming with the ultimate sanction of exclusion, the expression of behaviourism by the data set in the Omani context might consider inclusion as a method of control, part of a pedagogic maze designed to create a uniform product. Those with SEN may be behaviourally adapted and thus "cured" – at least as far as the pedagogic system is concerned. This is a simple and traditional approach, one that fits with a pedagogy based on rote, and which supposes the prime importance of external and explicit teaching routines.

In the behavioural paradigm, exercised by a non-Omani in the Omani context, externals are everything. When asked how he feels SEN provision is changing Mubarak says "I really have not *noticed* anything at all" (Mubarak, interviewed 2003: researcher's italics). The implication of this is to believe that those SEN students with physical disabilities make no psychological demands; that there are no SEN students with mixed disabilities, and that, somehow, boundaries can be erected to make care of SEN students in the educational context easier. In general, interviewees see behavioural deficits as the least of all the psychological aspects of SEN. Sometimes the psychological paradigm works the opposite way: Saif links "psychological problems" to a general "deterioration" of behaviour which may have a social dimension.

> Some [of the SEN students attending the al Wafa centre] have psychological disabilities … they have psychological problems; we can look at the disabled either as [being] disabled and suffering from a physical illness or suffering from a psychological illness … and some students really have psychological problems, not

> apparent but there in their behaviour. … Some of this [behaviour] is unacceptable, and we need to think about that, how to change [the behaviour] and make them fit in. (Saif, interviewed 2003)

The disabled are thus the objects of behavioural diagnosis and even when the SEN is not apparent it can be teased out from behavioural anomalies, and announced as a problem with a behavioural pathology. Psychological disability is strongly pathologized, and generates a particular contradiction in a respondent such as Saif whose religious paradigm is strongly articulated. If, as he correctly suggests, an Islamic society offers inclusive social solidarity, why do these problems he lists present like this and clearly worry him? Is he implicitly aware of his own ideological shortcomings? The psychological paradigm on which he also relies fails him, so a return to behavioural basics makes sense.

Zaid (interviewed 2003), a psychologist, seems to rely on behaviourist models such as those of Skinner (1953). Although this model is listed by Poplin (1988a) as one that occurs in a chronological sequence, after the medical and psychological models, she also suggests the similarity of all three models within a larger, reductionist paradigm – and it appears from these respondents as a bridge between medical and psychological models. Zaid suggests those worthy of receiving most help are those whose behaviour can most easily be appropriately modified; teacher education is then based on "giving [them] all the various categories". Yet Zaid is a source of contradiction and paradox, wishing to avoid older terminologies and adopt "American scientific names" for SENs, and encouraging "the idea of difference", while all students should be dealt with and treated.

The uses of testing in this model are confused by the collision of psychological and behaviourist practice.

> I should not, first of all, build any expectations about the person themselves. If we do that then I expected and found that the examination of intelligence was 68% and this was their level. This is a weakness and a strength … I take this to be a diagnostic not [a way] to judge this person. … There should be an alternative, so these tests are [just] diagnostic … not an exam to select the best, not an application for a job, just a way of helping adapt them. (Zaid, interviewed 2003)

Recognizing the limits of testing, Zaid implies knowledge of the damage done by testing which identifies and then stigmatizes. If testing is only a way of helping, a tool in the pedagogic kit, then fitting students in at a certain level may not help; testing and fitting rather than fitting and testing becomes another way to control – perhaps by determining behavioural parameters. Such fitting, like streaming in UK schools, must also be perceived as a judgement of the SEN student.

Zaid's psycho-behaviourist model of *adapting* students with SEN, infected with medicalized concepts, is repeated by Yazeed (interviewed 2003) who sees "kids with special needs [as demonstrating] an anomaly [in terms of] personal and social competency". Such anomalous behaviour needs "corrective training" and "medical intervention", a reductionist paradigm shared by models from the 1950s to the present, where the complex ideology of SEN is reduced to a single part. Attention is diverted from the reality of a child with SEN towards explanations that sit easily within a psychological paradigm (Poplin, 1988a). Both medical and psychological paradigms are reductionist. Yazeed sees psychology as being the most substantive practical ingredient in teacher

training for SEN, with such training extended to all training colleges. Yousif also believes in such an extension of training "provided it is accompanied by one or two psychology subjects", and also an extension of "psychological guidance" into every school – and "in the community" (Yousif, interviewed 2003). Yousif is among the most explicit in terms of promoting what he calls the psychological approach, rejecting the contention from some trainees that a psychology-based curriculum alone will develop SEN provision. Basma similarly feels teachers should obtain knowledge especially about psychology and "try to understand every stage of growth" (Basma, interviewed 2003). The superficiality of such comments suggests that, in the end, all paradigms will devolve into the simplest, most easily articulated – and practiced - ideas.

The psychological paradigm may be used to divide those with SEN into two: those who are psychologically and "socially disabled" (Saif, interviewed 2003), a strange concept that may be linked to the preference for invisible over visible disability, of behavioural adaptability over fixed behaviour, and those who are "physically disabled", which latter category for Saif does not include either the blind or the deaf, perhaps because he sees these as being needs already met by the specialist schools in Oman.

Hamed (interviewed 2003) attempts to draw some kind of balance between different approaches in meeting SEN, linking "the efforts of the social worker, psychologist and specialist teacher". Shaima is unique among the respondents for the complexity with which she fits psychology as practice and philosophy into teacher training and SEN care: she sees psychology as part of a holistic system of teacher training and then education

and care within the community and school. Teacher training is praised for being extended and deepened, linked to more than testing and diagnosis.

> We should study our system in Oman and concentrate on [issues of] social status, and consider [unique] cases which may not be the same in other countries, or be present but in different ways. (Shaima, interviewed 2003)

The social complexity of meeting SEN, and of training teachers to understand and be more aware, is, for Shaima, a holistic programme (Skrtic, 1995; Poplin, 1988b; Heshusius, 1982) of community-wide education. This approach runs contrary to the dominant psychological model (Bailey, 1998: 53), and Shaima sees a need to inculcate awareness of SEN earlier than the usual second year of TTC, including knowledge of social and class status with background and systematic provision, involving social workers and parents "in a suitable psychological environment" facilitated by school management, better training and increased awareness.

6.5: The question of inclusion or exclusion: social pariahs and allowed identities?

The medical and psychological/behaviourist paradigms seem to be the dominant conceptions expressed by the respondents, perhaps because these are the most powerful and pervasive globally – not just in Oman – and perhaps because these are the easiest to conceive of abstractly and in practice. However, these paradigms are maintained by specific concepts, such as social identity, and turning SEN into problems or deficits: such reductionism is apparent in the responses both within the 18 interviewees, and also and

equally within responses from the first tranche of 8 interviewees and in the documentation of the three special schools (chapter 4).

Pathologization of SEN may also be expressed, if not in terms of physical illness, then certainly in terms of some form of social exclusion – as the comments of Adil and Hussain (interviewed 2003) have suggested. Mubarak, early in his interview, stressed the need for SEN students to be referred "to special education schools and social rehabilitation units" (interviewed 2003). In many interviews, the use of various paradigms which drew a line between normal and abnormal is very clear, and created a set of people which, if allowed an identity were allowed it only in terms of what they lacked. Ishaaq identified SEN as "abnormal [psychology]" and "shortcomings in hearing and in talking … hearing … visual and speech disabilities" that set such students apart from "normal students" (Ishaaq, interviewed 2003). Psychology – or at least a derived discourse – provides the defining language.

> As regards colleagues who teach those with special needs there are some psychological terms [for those who] they consider abnormal, for children of special needs … shortcomings in hearing and talking and so on. (Ishaaq, interviewed 2003)

The milder the disability, the more likely the need will be met. Teacher trainees, he believes, need to be aware of the hierarchy of SEN, to know what identities can be fostered within the education system – and, logically, though more implicitly, what identities cannot.

> The teacher will meet various types of students who they [will inevitably] identify from among the normal students ... they [will need to be able to] identify those with learning disabilities or mental disabilities or any types of disability. There are some disabilities which can be addressed easily. (Ishaaq, interviewed 2003)

The exclusion of those whose disabilities cannot be "addressed easily" create needs which can be met by specialist teachers – teachers for a pariah class.

> Such a teacher should have experienced [different] students after graduation. Not everyone is able to handle those with special needs, unless they have proper skills and have taken various courses ... . [They need a] general and a deep idea of the matter ... as the teacher in this case will handle abnormal people and we need to remember that those with special needs aren't always disabled ... [they] can even be geniuses. (Ishaaq, interviewed 2003)

The last remark may be there to sugar the pill of exclusion: the overt message is, differences of all kinds need to be met; the implicit message is, disablement should be excluded.

One of the key considerations in the study of SEN is where systemic problems are located. A reductionist paradigm identifies and locates problems in students, who are passive objects of pedagogy and policy, rather than being in charge of their own destinies, and this is a common perception among the interviewees. (Fulcher, 1999) Not many respondents utilize the holistic and inclusive paradigm displayed by Shaima, where professionals act as facilitators and a suitable environment is one which is student-centred. For Shaima, pedagogic practice and therefore teacher training is inclusive; identity is not imposed from without but expressed from within, by those with SEN, on

their terms. Zaid contrasts powerfully with this position; for him, those with SEN are expressed, first as percentages (13% or 10% - he is not clear) and then condescendingly.

> [SEN students are better served] in special schools [where] the disabled person himself feels he is not different [because] he is with similar people, with whom he will compare himself and he will not feel they are better than him. (Zaid, interviewed 2003)

Students of all kinds have their needs met on the terms of educational professionals; for those with SEN this conceptualization of identity imposed is even clearer. Is it reasonable to suppose that Zaid's paradigm of education is one in which the teachers *form* their students, and do so in unchallenging environments where difference is not an issue? Since those with SEN are in greater need of being dealt with and *controlled*, imposed identity is an expected aspect of teaching abnormal people. Teacher training, by extension, becomes a question of designing pedagogic systems of treatment and handling and control according to Saif – hardly education, by his admission.

Loai's view of SEN as a *flawed* state draws a clear line between the flawless and socially acceptable, those who can be integrated, and those who are imperfect. The spectrum of variation appears immutable and certain and safe. At the furthest extreme of the flawed category those with "complete disability" may not be candidates for education: what used to be called the ineducable in the UK. While some disabilities may be treatable and thus be made to recede there will always be some which generate a pariah status. In terms of teacher training this sends a clear message: some students should not be considered reachable within pedagogic practice. Although Loai does go on to suggest that

educational policy should incorporate those with SEN, this may either be an attempt to fit in with the perceived ideology of the interviewer, or because Loai did not perceive the inherent contradictions of his own position. He wants teacher training to inculcate alertness, and suggests that "everyone is subject to treatment" (Loai, interviewed 2003), suggesting a mix of exclusive and radically inclusive philosophies – or, more likely, of confusion and uncertainty. Salwa and Dunya (interviewed 2003) operate an exclusionist or segregationist paradigm, preferring SEN students to be distributed to relevant organizations outside the aegis of state education: theirs is an active aim to segregate, simplifying SEN to a category in what is reductionism at its purest. Dunya expresses the old arguments in favour of streaming.

> The teachers have poor, average and high achievers and of course cannot handle of these with one individual plan … he deals with them all in the same manner without considering their different levels and behaviour. (Dunya, interviewed 2003)

Teacher training needs to recognize, in this model, the logic of segregation, where SEN is defined by problems caused, and is facilitated by avoiding problems it generates for the teachers. Maher actively rejects advancing SEN understanding within teacher training – "I really have no idea of how special education is studied" (Maher, interviewed 2003); the only place for such training is within the narrow area of specialization, which allows Maher to simplify and retain an ideological comprehensiveness that Loai cannot. The idea of allowing those with SEN some kind of access to education but denying any rights, Dunya finds, is part of the development of a better perception of SEN: an implicit attitude among many respondents. Thus politics, SEN and teacher training are divorced. At one

and the same time, teacher training is expected to recognize and meet some SEN, but deeper concepts of disability and social identity are shut off.

Social attitudes may also have an effect on the types of disability that can be accepted in the classroom: whereas it might be expected that teacher trainers identify mental illness as a primary problem in the classroom, Mubarak (interviewed 2003) puts a great deal of store by appearance – for him physical appearance defines acceptance socially and thus within the classroom; mental disability is somehow more includable than physical disability. Visibility defines the category and the severity of the SEN. The implicit model here is one of visible conformity: in dress and appearance. The deeper identity of students is not relevant to the training of teachers: an unusual concept, but perhaps one that suggests deeper psychological identity and external identity are almost one and the same.

What then is the reason for teaching in this context? Perhaps teaching exists to serve the processing of aesthetically acceptable products. Mubarak is prone to use pathologizing language, where SEN are identified as problems which are suffered – essentially his paradigm of disability is confused with superficial qualities, a paradigm of pedagogy set to produce similarity rather than difference and divergence.

Mubarak's conceptualization is not too far from the position that acceptability and compatibility are synonymous. Yousif categorizes SEN according to "norms … compatible with society" (Yousif, interviewed 2003): in other words, pedagogy is a process of homogenization; if some cannot be homogenized, it is their fault, "they have individual deviations [and they are] burdens" (Yousif, interviewed 2003) on their

families. Pariah status is thus the fault of those with SEN, not of the teacher, the school, the education system or society.

6.6: Discursive boundaries

All these concepts, and the paradigms they serve, are maintained by certain ideological and terminological boundaries (Corbett, 1997), discursive boundaries which may generate feelings of ideological, psychological or even philosophical/theological safety.

Saif's philosophical foraging has an *ad hoc* element to it, and produces a chaotic, personalized, *ad hoc* guide to meeting SEN, where he falls back on anecdotes of his own experience: "a girl came to me and I came to understand she had psychological problems" (Saif, interviewed 2003) – there is no question, for Saif, that whatever SEN the girl had may have needed specialist attention; instead everything is dealt with in an unstructured way that refers back to some very simple personal philosophy – a philosophy the very ingenuousness of which allows its practical inadequacy to pass unnoticed by many. In another case, while dealing with an attempted suicide, he "chalks out a line" for the student. What he means is that he imposes his certainties and clarities on those with SEN – this chalk line creates a comfortable space, a clear division between categories that helps Saif deal with those confusingly invasive concepts exposed whenever disablement is discussed. Chalking lines prevents infection.

Such lines are very frequent in one form or another. Boundaries around certain categories may have more to do with conservative social paradigms of what constitutes acceptability

and normality. For Basma this boundary is absolute: she sees the importance of appropriate and thorough diagnosis to screen for *any* type of disability, "even partial disability" (Basma, interviewed 2003). Those with disabilities are categorized as having problems – though she also admits the causes of disability should be investigated, and also that "the disabled may have positive sides which we can make use of" (Basma, interviewed 2003). This suggests that, although imperfect and mostly negative in terms of their place in the classroom, the disabled may have some uses – their role, for teachers, ceases to be part of a receptive and mutually developmental pedagogy, and becomes more like the role of a rabbit in a cage. Even so contained and constrained Basma is still fearful that some negative aspects may leak from the infected SEN student into the education of regular uninfected students, and have negative repercussions. "Abnormal" SEN students, she suggests, offer "too many deviations" (Basma, interviewed 2003) to be taken seriously in teacher training – though SEN students should be handled, there is an avoidance of any suggestion of deeper ideological change in pedagogic philosophy. The overall aim of teacher training, teaching and education should be "social harmony" – something which the abnormal or deviant or alien threaten. Loai links normal to "flawless", and sees those with SEN as "flawed" (Loai, interviewed 2003).

A boundary defined as between the normal and the abnormal, the normal and the deviant runs deep in respondents' explanations of teaching practice: Naader repeats this paradigm and develops it.

> Disability is not normal [it is having] some sort of deviation … the normal child is the flawless child who has the aptitude and flair to learn properly and without difficulty. (Naader, interviewed 2003)

The difficulty in this case being one of having to adjust teacher training and practice in any substantial way: no teacher is able to say that there are students who can learn without difficulty.

In Naader's case his paradigm of normality is strongly linked to an Arab identity: foreign concepts of disablement have no place. How far this conceptualization of SEN as a set of ideas too closely linked to an expatriate-based teaching profession extends into the ideologies of other teacher trainers, and thus to teachers, is hard to judge; and how far it is built up or eroded during the current evolution of teacher training and career guidance in Oman is impossible to say. It may be that Naader's nationalistic boundaries are limited, and even part of an older, isolated identity; but it may also be the case that, as Oman develops, there may be a reaction to those concepts considered somehow alien, and that, in the short to medium terms, this reaction may be of considerable importance: Omanization of teacher training may be an excuse, especially for those without a deep educational philosophy, to develop a narrow national-identity based conceptualization of specialist SEN teacher training as foreign.

6.7: Conclusion

The reason for the dominance of the psychomedical paradigm, and the associated sub-paradigm of behaviourism, is firstly the preponderance in Oman of the genetic origins of

various disabilities, and secondly that the majority of teacher training is still based in the College of Education at SQU, where the Department of Psychology has a significant ideological presence, as it has also at the various TTCs. What has been examined in this chapter is how included or excluded teacher trainers consider those with SEN to be, ideally or really. What is missing, but can be inferred, is how those with SEN themselves feel. The spectrum of perceived variation creates certain divisions: between deviant and normal, between educable and ineducable, flawed and flawless.

The examination of those concepts most apparent in the interviews indicates that they are constructed to make sense of an environment which categorizes pragmatically, and often without challenging practice or paradigms. These concepts are often very personal, and may not always be linked to practice or, specifically, policy. They may have religious themes, or be linked to personal experience, or be a reaction to the rapidly changing times Oman is experiencing. Although there are other suggestions for paradigms which might apply to teaching (Lipsky and Gartner, 1989) in some ways those most readily evinced are those which are easiest to comprehend in a developing social and political context.

Paradigms grow and change (Lewis, 1998) and are displaced *organically* through the processes of research and policy adaptation, communication, practice and experience. Developing countries such as Oman may confound the expectation of paradigmatic change because their social structures are not themselves the results of consecutive organic change. The political and social structures of all Gulf States remains fluid, dependent on oil exports to buoy up national spending, and with little in the way of

historical development to give teachers, teacher trainers or academics a deep sense of identity into which practice may be slotted. Therefore, paradigms of the psychomedical variety (and sometimes of the behaviourist variety) are easily adapted, overlaying without apparent friction a considerable amount of wider paradigmatic confusion and uncertainty. Although there may be many more similarities than differences when comparing teaching and teacher training in the so-called developed and developing worlds, essential differences remain – among these the burden of historical identity, the youthfulness and newness of conceptualizing disablement, the link between psychological training and teacher training and the way political, social and religious structures in Oman determine and constrict education policy-making. This latter element is crucial in the development of teacher training and SEN and chapter 7 will examine the processes which make Omani education policy-making and policy-transmission unique.

In terms of future developments in SEN teacher training and provision, the concepts described in this chapter suggest that change may, in the short to medium terms, be resisted by a conservative cadre of educational professionals. However, in the longer term, there is evidence of discontent and paradigmatic shifts among a few respondents that points to a complete revision of current practice. Since Oman is a country where more that 50% of the population is under 15 (see chapter 1) there may be a growing pressure for such revision as new generations overwhelm previous ones.

CHAPTER 7: ANALYSIS PART 2 – POLICY

This chapter will assess education policy as reconstructed and understood by the respondents: policy already in place for teacher trainers and those students with SEN, and policies forthcoming or perceived to be needed. It will examine what interviewees think of as policy; it will consider where, for interviewees, policy may either be too abstract or too radical or, indeed, too slow-moving or conservative. It will interpret what they want from policy thereby offering a picture of policy struggles in Oman, in terms of the provision of services for those with SEN. It looks at gaps between policy intentions – the "spaces between purposes" (Ozga, 2000: 10) that create a patchwork of provision; it examines present policy as the continuance of the status quo; and the corruption or confusion expressed in policy as struggle.

Also examined are questions of policy – the policy of the Ministries of Higher Education and Education and, indirectly, the Ministry of Social Development as well as the resulting policies of SQU, TTCs, schools and special schools, articulated by teacher trainers and senior members of those institutions – and the effects of policy on those with SEN. Centrally, this chapter examines two different perceptions of what policy is and how it works from the coding of the interviews: **policy as status-quo** and policy as *struggle* (Ozga, 2000) or rather the struggle implicit in **corrupted or confused policy,** showing how effective these perceptions are in describing the Omani education policy-making context.

7.1: The meaning of policy

By "policy" what is often implied at a macro level is the plans and aims of government. Policy suggests not only how things are done now, it also posits a forward-looking element – how things will be done: this is policy as a continuum of thought and practice that feeds into political deeds (Ball, 1993). In Oman education policy is articulated first by the head of state or other senior government members, then by the bureaucracies of the various ministries, and finally down the educational hierarchy appointed by those ministries. This is Omani education policy as practice, articulating a position – or set of positions – in a top-down manner later analogized in this chapter as the dependent bead thread.

Looking at the original coding, and considering how to develop specific areas of contention, certain questions guided analysis.

(1) Are interviewees aware of how education policy is developed by educational structures and within the classroom, and are they aware of how this is changing?

(2) Are they in favour of greater consultation in the development of education policy – either explicitly or implicitly?

(3) Are they concerned about the representative nature of education policy?

This chapter, in the way it examines how people react to policy formation, is less about the realities of policy creation and its effects of target groups, and more about the ghosts of policy – the negative images of a social consensus.

The attempt here is nothing as grand as a wish to generate new social theory, nor to opine that extant theory has its limitations or strengths; rather it is to consider what a group of respondents – each with a slightly different policy fingerprint (a print they make themselves, or which is made on them; some interviewees were more active or involved others more passive or detached) – perceive of as educational policy in Oman, how this relates to teacher training and to SEN.

7.2: What is education policy in the Omani context?

Policy generation is never a simple equation: X is needed to help Y get to Z (X equalling "policy" in this context). Who and what, for example, are Y? And what might be Z?

Education policy, in certain situations, is built for a purpose – it is not merely an articulation of a philosophical position. Overtly its purpose is to increase provision, fine-tune education, extend and modernize curricula, ask questions about what should be taught (the moral dimension of policy) the question of the obligation and rationale of education as policy (the political dimension) and, finally, questions of method (the pedagogic dimension) (Hindess, 1986). What should be added here is that the political dimension has also an economic rationale – SEN and teacher training take place within a global capitalist context modelled on and dominated by the US and EU. But through all this, often explicitly, runs the articulation, in education policy at all levels and of all kinds, to regulate and control.

It should not be imagined that policy is only something initiated by the political authority – the government – and experienced by everyone else. Policy exists anew at each stage of its implementation: it exists at every level of hierarchy, in government certainly, in ministries, in colleges and training bodies, in universities and schools – and, finally, microcosmically in classrooms. "Policy practices [are] made at all levels in the educational apparatus" (Fulcher, 1999: 143). What Fulcher considers a remaking of policy at each level fits the Western perception of consultative implementation, but in Oman and other, similar states where exactly is education policy made, is it ever remade, where is it enacted, and what happens in-between? Galloway and Goodwin's (1987) top-down model of this policy creation and implementation may well be a good model for Oman where there has never been any reason to move away from an autocratic system of education policy-making created over the past thirty-five years.

In any system ideas formulated as policy change as they filter down from policy-makers to policy developers to, finally, those who implement that policy – or react to it, interpret or reject it – in the classroom, and those in the classroom who interact with and synthesise those ideas: policy is cut, re-sized, reinterpreted (Ball, 1997). Hence Dunya's urgent interest in multi-level analyses to develop a clear working philosophy of SEN provision.

> First of all [every level of the teaching hierarchy] should know what special education is, what are the needs of those with special needs, why should there be such as thing as special education, what is the philosophical basis of such a thing as special education … if we launch special education should there be a curriculum of its own … [with] this category? Should there be means and facilities and equipment

> for this category? If we define such things … it will create some sort of change. (Dunya, interviewed 2003)

Dunya returns to a basic – but vital – question in terms of SEN policy: what *is* special education? What she fears is that SEN will be another tweak to educational policy handed down without the necessary discussions and preparations filtered through practitioners. What she paradoxically both fears and wants is the creation of "[some] sort of change". Her point is not that there should be no SEN provision, but that any provision needs to be the result of adequate policy development and not merely another implant from the policy-making elite. She wants ideas to circulate. She understands that defining policy will effect change; implicitly she suggests that lack of definition means lack of understanding, no philosophical basis for provision, and therefore no change at all.

7.3: Policy models

It is possible to posit three basic policy development models: the autocratic model, the hierarchic model and the "diffuse" model (Ozga, 2000: 2). The autocratic model refers to concentrated, activating power; the hierarchic model describes a distribution of power within an elite (perhaps to heads of TTCs) and the diffuse model acknowledges a wider distribution through a political system. These are crude approximations of the deployment of power within societies – it should not be assumed that power is a tangible resource, to be channelled and adumbrated easily; the more autocratic or hierarchic the model, the more policy interpretation may be squeezed into such unexpected corners as with these interviewees. Among the interviewees perceptions of policy and therefore its implementation are affected by people whose paradigms of power could be described as

autocratic, hierarchic or diffuse. Among the respondents, typically Maher and Saif articulate the first model; Zaid the second, and Dunya or Shaima the third.

> Talking about obstacle[s] is not important in the Sultanate in education as there are no problems and [we] develop all citizens in all fields. All we need is the time to arrange and organize these things. (Maher, interviewed 2003)
>
> We submitted [a proposal on a special needs centre] to His Excellency the Minister of Higher Education through the proper channel, the Director General and so on … but the Ministry did not agree so far … there are no [financial] allocations. (Saif, interviewed 2003)

Although Maher seems to be open to influences that come from "all citizens in all fields", an openness developed by a view that the only constriction may lie in the elasticity of time - the model he deploys nevertheless determines directions, from a central, infallible authority which does not need to be influenced – "talking about obstacle[s] is not important"; Saif's concern with, and deference to autocratic principles (in this case Education Ministers and Directors General) here creates a problem since those principles are not open to change – a typical autocratic bind: a personal political-philosophical choice has been made which then disallows choice as a political activity and no means of appeal are available.

The hierarchic model is no less likely to draw power upwards away from schools, teachers and teacher trainers, creating a system of resistance.

> Sometimes taking decisions – the decision making is the problem. For me I would prefer to make these decisions more quickly, but decisions have no effect unless [those at] the bottom have some understanding, [those at] the top are not taking

> decisions unless they feel pressure from [those at] the bottom. … [There is] negativity due to an absence of information. (Zaid, interviewed 2003)

This negativity is what Al Belushi (2003) describes as disenchantment. The hierarchic model is perceived by many as the way educational policy works and should work in Oman: it reflects wider social models and the realities of social class; it has within it both the comfort of the known, and recognition of practical difficulties. A diffuse model of policy – which may reflect some deeper realities of policy change in many environments, but not in those which are determined by traditional patriarchal power structures – exists more as a hope for change.

> We should change the idea of a teacher, we should listen to the teacher who lives and works in a society … in a city or in the school itself, if the teacher understood and were really convinced of the need [for the appropriate policy] this would be reflected positively … . (Dunya, interviewed 2003)

Here the diffuse model is represented by a hope that change may come from listening, understanding and active communication. This diffuse model is based on interactivity as the motor of education policy-making and change.

7.4: Gaps between policy intentions: "Spaces between purposes" (Ozga, 2000: 10)

The *ad hoc* and patchwork nature of Omani SEN provision and relevant teacher training has already been described (see chapters 1, 4 and 5) and this may be the result of the system of policy-making at ministerial level. There is always a tension between subject and object, between principle policy-maker(s) and policy object(s); the way policy is communicated or "transmitted" (Ozga, 2000: 10) is bound to be complex because the

means of transmission are via interconnected or partially connected, or partially disconnected rhizomic structures.

Modification of policy may occur more often, more complexly and with greater sensitivity in particular situations, specific policy areas and in certain societies. However, Oman's communication of education policy does not allow such modification and turns those "spaces between purposes" (Ozga, 2000: 10) that always occur into dead dependent spaces. These spaces constitute a copy in negative of the power structure, a trail of intention. Maher, though an educational psychologist, seems remarkably oblivious to or careless of this policy trail. The interview illustrates an almost haphazard generation of committees and sub-committees – a generation which takes the place of policy-making but which is smoke rather than heat.

> Yes, I was one of the committee [discussing SEN] and we went to [one of the] colleges with the Dean … then this matter [of provision] came up for discussion, so then we formed a sub-committee at the level of [the Department of] Psychology and one of the subjects was this report about special education and how to deal [with it] … then we worked on it and fished out some information from Egypt and Syria and parts of the Arab world and tried to create a database for special education, and we worked on that … then we realized the importance of this area and concluded it was a project of four or five years in terms of [TTC] teaching and other requirements … . We forwarded the results [of the committee] to the colleges. (Maher, interviewed 2003)

Maher's conception of policy would probably be quite different if it involved a subject to which he felt committed; nevertheless he has spent time "fishing out information" and comparing practice and policy, to the end that the results of his deliberations were "forwarded to the [TTC] colleges" but whether followed up, or whether the report

received any feedback, or whether it altered policy or could alter policy in any way seems almost irrelevant in what he says. There was, apparently, no forwarding of the results to the Ministerial hierarchy. The usual dynamic instability which allows a renegotiation of policy is locked out of the equation, making the spaces for policy implementation less fertile than might otherwise be the case. Maher is, in this sense, a resistant force, unwilling to develop those fertile spaces – perhaps hoping they will not be developed.

Hillage et al (1998) differentiate three basic types of policy motivation or policy complexion: political ideology, pragmatism and personal prejudice. Political ideology is a socio-political model of how things *should* be structured, and calls upon concepts of justice; pragmatism is a Hobbesian conceit of doing only what fits the task and resources available – concepts of justice are almost irrelevant (Hobbes, 1975); personal prejudice is an underlying melody likely to affect the other types since it is the template on which these may be fixed or from which they operate. These motivations are clearly present in what the respondents say, in various degrees. Samir's ideological motivation seems political, perhaps partly because of his national origins and his personalized expression of policy creation.

> In Sur I spoke to the female teacher and she told me that they are giving attention only to the mentally retarded children … I told her that this is a big job and I am a psychologist, I can work with her and give advice, so that she can know who really deserved direct educational support. I told her that this experience is unique in the Arab world, as we in [my home state] so far did not find a form for this programme. (Samir, interviewed 2003)

His encouragement and proffering of comparative information has a political rather than merely pedagogic point: to create awareness of good policy and build on this awareness.

> Do we have a specific programme or an educational strategy which should incorporate all those [with] disabilities? In order for the kid to grow or to succeed, the family has a role to play, the school has a role to play and the social organizations have a role to play and ultimately and most importantly the Ministry has a role to play. … To avoid school failure everyone must play their role. (Samir, interviewed 2003)

By incorporating the government apparatus into the policy-making and enacting role, Samir makes a clear personal statement of political linkages, how they need to be fostered and maintained: this is a holistic vision of policy. Personal prejudices as a policy motivation for Naader take various forms, suggesting he finds bureaucracy irksome, or that he simply wants to work without the complications suggested by questions from the hierarchy regarding disablement.

> The education system in Oman should have a proud identity … there are a lot of memoranda in the Educational Studies Division, we now have twelve volumes! I feel it is a waste of time. I note they want particular experiences to make use of … fine, I have to scrutinize the requests carefully and see how to fit them into our courses with a certain identity [but] I should ignore it. (Naader, interviewed 2003)

Naader's role as an educational psychologist is probably one which allows him little space to achieve potential or carry out useful policy, or develop policy within the College. Instead his attitude is coloured by a sense that what is being done is, mostly, futile and not much good for the reputation of Oman's education system.

Pragmatic motivation, however, is by far the largest category emerging from the coding of the data, probably for similar reasons highlighted by Al-Belushi (2003) who observed that teachers within the education system mostly did their jobs and waited for retirement. Pragmatism – getting through the work with a minimum of distraction, and an approach which recognizes limits and may be optimistic rather than critical – is the key.

> How do we change the teachers' approaches [to SEN] so they can accept this category and how do we professionally and academically prepare teachers also to accept this category when they find in the class students who suffer from these things … can they handle this category? There are problems … I think the situation at present is better than earlier. There are big changes, the community is organized and objectives are defined. … I think the scene is ready for another shift. (Adil, interviewed 2003)

Here Adil expresses a pragmatic distance from the problems he describes. He poses a crucial question but then answers it with what sound like vague political rather than professional assurances which tail off into an even vaguer prediction. Implicit in his comments is that is up to others to answer more precise questions of pedagogic preparation – even though he is a experienced teacher trainer. It seems that he does not want to be linked to the initiation of policy, though he would like to be linked with successful policy shift – once that success has been proved. A useful comparison could be made with the initial interview conducted in chapter 4 with Noora (interviewed 2001) – who occupies a senior ministerial position. Both have certain responsibilities, but while Noora is critically precise and incisive, Adil is vague. In context, however, it is Noora who is unusual. Her approach (see chapter 4.1) is informal yet prescriptively precise and rich with ideas; Adil's approach is its mirror image – he is formal yet imprecise and

offers few, if any, ideas. Shadowed implicitly in Adil's responses are the facts of power and influence in Omani state educational apparatuses.

7.4.1: Power and consensus

There is a tension between formal and informal models of policy implementation and creation (Brown et al, 1995). The formal top-down model leaves out the democratizing forces from below – the teacher, the teacher trainers, pupils and parents – and is linked to notions of power and dominance, and also to gender in Oman. This is particularly visible in female respondents who may feel aggrieved by this.

> I think nothing [about my current environment]. We receive the courses from the ministry, even if we have an opinion, sometimes about these courses or their modification our opinions are ignored. Anyway we wrote many letters to the ministry, and still the same courses arrive unchanged. Those in charge of the [policy on] curriculum have the greater role to play … but change does not come the way we want. (Salwa, interviewed 2003)

This is Omani education policy in action – a top-down system which pays very little attention to the views even of experienced teacher trainers such as Salwa. This is policy simplified until it is little more than repetitive caveat.

Both Ozga and Ball argue that policy should be considered as both text and discourse (Ozga, 2000: 94; Ball, 1990). It is useful to think of policy in either of these ways in the Omani context. However, it is more generative, when considering the unique pressures of the Omani system, which also has meaning for teacher training and SEN in that context, to consider policy as discourse. This examination of discourses recognizes that most

approaches to policy are either pragmatic or personal, fitting specific policy into a wider if often informal ideological system, and considering it within the *structure* of a whole system – whose wholeness may or may not constitute a consensus.

Policy as text – for example the decrees as they affect the Ministry of Education – only exists superficially to practice and debate within Oman: unlike the UK where government education policy is minutely worked out, worked on, discussed and debated, education policy in Oman devolves into what Seddon (1996: 201) might consider a network of interconnectedness; a limited consensus which is not society-wide. This network of interconnected people is amply demonstrated by Samir's concept of "a certain inclusiveness" (Samir, interviewed 2003).

> The disability of a student is a responsibility of the community and responsibility of the government and the responsibility of the concerned educational establishments. We should also find social-educational organizations to shed light on … disability … [T]hese organizations should work along with the country's programmes in terms of [wider] educational policy. The Omani citizen should try to identify [with] a proper education system … [T]here should be a programme, [an] applicable programme. (Samir, interviewed 2003)

This putative network Samir suggests is an ideal of educational consensus which, as yet, Oman has not reached – interconnectedness through shared policy also allows the citizen to gain some amount of personal identity within the system which serves them. A proper educational programme which brings in policy-adapting citizens is an ideal situation, yet one which Samir claims is not in place.

There is a division of formulation and implementation in any policy context; in the Omani context formulation, or rather reformulation, is necessary to reconnect education policy with the people who will implement it and the methods they will use (Bowe et al, 1992: 98) as well as the people who may benefit – without policy generated to fit the needs and context of its society there can be little sense of an agreed identity reflected in a bureaucratic process. Consensus and identity are not built in to the Omani educational discourse.

> I feel we have no identity, what we have of policy is a flower from everyone else's garden. The education system in Oman should have a distinguished identity. (Naader, interviewed 2003)

Naader's existential despair is another negative result of disconnected policy, resolved at Ministerial level on borrowed models, which then alienates those who must either carry that policy through to teacher trainers and teachers, or those who must carry that policy out. No education policy can ever simply be transmitted to teacher trainers, trainees and teachers, who then just implement it. Perhaps most especially so in the Omani and similar contexts, transmission is where struggles occur but with various unique constraints that create public – self-consciously acceptable – discourses and private, sometimes implicit discourses, both of which can be identified by inference. The public discourse is bureaucratic and unconnected.

> It … is just a curriculum, nothing else, where is the work? There is no proper attention in this regard, all we hear are plans and desires. (Naader, interviewed 2003)

The expression of Naader's frustration is hardly obscured: policy is a discourse disconnected from "work" or results. The private discourse is hidden or isolated by the level of frustration.

> We need [SEN courses] in the Sultanate, we have great numbers but no one pays them [any] attention … and there is no flexibility … we really need [someone to pay] attention to these [policy] needs. (Shaima, interviewed 2003)

This is a cry from a policy wilderness – the needs Shaima articulates are explicit unlike those articulated by Adil – where, as Al Belushi (2003) describes, there are considerable barriers both to useful policy implementation, and the adequate communication that would facilitate it. There is neither "inert acceptance" nor "romantic resistance" (Ozga, 2000: 112) but a level of both as power is sieved through a complex drain of individuals and institutions not yet used to the effects of power. But educational policy in a top-down developmental context is never going to be "a cycle of processes in which practitioners are conceptualized as actively engaged with the process of policy-making, in ways that may modify its forms and messages" (Ozga, 2000: 112); the level of active engagement may be absent or minimal and therefore can only yield minimal tangible policy results. Breaks in the communication cycle constantly occur to frustrate implementation and innovation.

> We saw some momentum in this regard [SEN policy]. Here in Oman we don't want to do only a programme for learning difficulties, we want to make inclusion policy, but the current problem is that parents don't report cases … so we want more data coming from [parents] and from the upcoming census in October [2003] … we now have a programme and we've started to familiarize women about early intervention … [but] we don't know their responses. (Hussain, interviewed 2003)

One of the important aspects of education policy implementation anywhere is the role of the teacher (Al Belushi, 2003): problems with the teacher's motivation, vocational aspirations, self-esteem and collegiality all affect micro policy development. Policy is an application, in practice, of an understanding in theory; the practice is plainly constrained by environment, personal attitudes, other teachers and immediate stresses. As Al Belushi (2003) points out, in Oman teachers' motivations to be in the classroom in the first place are weak: often they are there because it is the only acceptable profession for women (the classrooms of state schools are single-sex in Oman), and because extrinsic rewards (pay, holidays and job security) are substantial. This is not conducive to any effective generation of policy from those who, in other nation states, have the most to say (Booth, 1983; Biklen, 1985; Noel et al, 1985; Fulcher, 1988). Environments clearly vary: in the Australian State of Victoria (Fulcher, 1999: 251) there may be far greater democratization of policy-making than in the UK. In Oman, if a spectrum analogy is used, there are considerable variants – the clan system of patriarchy, poor regionalism, the absence of meaningful policy-transmission structures, bureaucracies designed to obscure rather than reveal intentions – which put education policy-making and control at the opposite extreme to Victoria.

A recurrent policy issue coded from explicit or implicit responses was the nature or identity of Omani education: the conceptualization of provision, the intention to build a literate, numerate and aware population which can both participate in and help build a state as it moves from being oil-dependency to an economically diversified and growing consultative democracy.

> We [need to] engage with [the university hierarchy] in a proper, continuous dialogue … in the past the situation was different, and the viewpoint then was that there was no need [for consultation] but now I am sure the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Social Affairs as well as my own side are keen [to talk] in the public interest. (Riad, interviewed 2003)

Yet the dialogue between Ministries and educators – teacher trainers specifically – is clearly not two way, with Riad carefully intimating that the authorities *should* do things which they *don't.*

> We are in the Twenty-First century … and the [training] programmes should be designed to meet various future challenges, the University should ask divisions what kind of programmes [are needed] right from the start, the most important thing being the consequences [of training techniques]. (Riad, interviewed 2003)

The obsessions of bureaucrats are not directed towards the objects of their policies (teachers in this case, and teacher trainers) but merely to operate policy for its own sake.

> We set the tests we get from Ministries but these don't fit [student's] mental abilities or the surrounding circumstances. They say "change this" but the changes [they suggest] are inadequate or wrong. There need to be some dramatic changes [in policy]. (Naader, interviewed 2003)

There is nothing unique in a situation where those who work with or in a certain environment feel disconnected from the responsible bureaucratic hierarchies – in the UK many health and education professionals would probably articulate similar qualities of disaffection. What is interesting here is the depth of the lack of civil consensus. In the UK a basic consensus exists which maintains a policy direction in most cases most of the time; disagreements usually exist as adumbrations to a basically agreed method. In Oman

it is possible that, whereas there may be identifiable strands regarding nursery education, curricula, the education of women, tertiary and adult education and of course SEN, there is little agreement about aims.

How deeply these disconnections are acknowledged, and whether they are acknowledged at all, creates or confounds the momentum of policy regarding SEN – whether disablement within education is acknowledged positively, negatively or neutrally, or even grudgingly, are important considerations that affect teacher training and SEN.

7.5: Oman and education policy as status quo

Consensus and status quo have a dynamic relationship: the political cycles of the UK illustrate frequently that what is in place and what is generally accepted as right and good fall regularly out of alignment. The political struggle uses this, keeping a wary eye on the need to maintain at least a sense of social agreement – where consensus fails, education policy becomes disconnected *dictat*. Policy innovation and its opposite - a reliance on those education policies and practices already in place and understood – are always in a state of some dynamic tension. The more conservative the binding educational ideologies of the state, the fewer chances for policy access at levels other than for the elite, the more likely policy will be built within the status quo – a construction which works to sustain that status quo further.

Williams (1962: 172) divides policy-makers in England – as opposed to the UK – into three ideologically distinct groups: politicians, bureaucrats and professionals. This

distinction works well within the political power technology (Foucault, 1991: 24) of the UK, but Oman has a different division of education policy-makers, and they evince different beliefs, values and tastes (Ball, 1990a: 5). Education bureaucrats take over politicians' conservative disinclination for radical change, unless that change is the retrenchment of "cultural restorationists" (Ball, 1990a: 6) – those for whom status quo and consensus are closely identified. Typical of this cultural restorationism is the more subtle approach of Zaid who believes "those at the top cannot make decisions unless those at the bottom can be made to understand these decisions" (interviewed 2003) contrasted with the approach of Saif, a senior social psychologist, who implicitly distrusts change in favour of a personal, culturally-specific system, an exclusive religious paradigm based on a personalized code where "right and wrong" are absolutes. Saif dislikes the idea of policy based on non-regional, non-Arab and therefore, possibly, non-Islamic practice – policy means "following the proper [acceptable] channel" using only other Gulf states as models of implementation and practice (see chapter 1.4.8 where the Salamanca Conference seems to have been ignored, perhaps because it runs contrary to cultural restorationist practice).

Thus, the education policy-making structure in Oman is more highly, and perhaps more conservatively politicized than might be expected. However, partially outside this elite lie an alternative group characterized by those like Shaima (interviewed 2003) and Noora (interviewed 2001), who see consensus as something to be adapted and struggled over rather than dictated. In Oman, education policy, instead of being based on the experiences of many different people – from teacher trainers to pupils and their families – is often an

attempt to remove awkward, messy, complicating factors. Policy simplifies in this context, rolling back the system to one where, ideally, elements such as SEN do not exist either as categories or policy variables, resolving the problem into the old category of the "ineducable", for which policies are hardly needed. Where education policy does consider those with SEN, the experiences of the data set suggest the disconnecting gap between policy and interpretation, between policy and practice will remain in the short to medium terms.

While it is salutary to remember Foucault's description of power as diffuse and, by its nature shared rather than owned, "exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations" (Foucault, 1990: 94) and thus of policy as the diffuse effect of a diffuse source, it is also important to remember that policy is contextually sited: Oman is not the same as the UK. Research also benefits from a recognition that policy, as initiated process, is directed almost entirely from (if not by) bureaucrats who themselves do not form a homogenous class, but break down into senior political, middle pragmatic (Maher, Younnis, Zaid, Saif interviewed 2003), and junior radical (Dunya and Shaima interviewed 2003). This research does not often touch on the first group (with the putative exceptions of Noora and Hind (interviewed 2001), and an element of personal experience) since seniority is not gained by experience necessarily, nor by expertise. It is deference to the defining bureaucratic elite that defines all policy decisions to some extent, and throws a boundary around implementation and interpretation. Maher does this by avoiding admitting the need for specific state wide policy.

It is the teacher not the society, not the [Ministry] – if he [the teacher] has a background in such cases [of SEN] and if he is [either] aware of the situation or does not understand it, he should just deal with [the SEN student] like other students. The teacher should have the sole authority to decide on such cases – though the school community should also provide [SEN students] with proper facilities to help [them] overcome their learning difficulties. (Maher, interviewed 2003)

Policy is denied – or deferred – since Maher does not wish to suggest that he is challenging the status quo. This may be due to his position which he does not want compromised. It may also be due to other more conservative aspects of his personal ideology, where acceptance of what is, is better than change; or his awareness of Omani and wider Arab politics and culture as systems whose identities are somehow threatened – SEN provision could be seen as such a threat since it has evolved elsewhere.

> There [are] challenges in the Omani community. I understand anyone is exposed to such disabilities, so the community should find ways these individuals [can be brought to] accept their situation. This will only happen when the disabled [person] realizes responsibility lies on the shoulders of the entire community. (Maher, interviewed 2003)

Essentially, what exists is best – the only change considered is to extend some kind of responsibility, but one which looks back to localized and individualized rather than policy-driven care.

For Oman, I don't think there is any problem, as we provide all the necessary facilities which enable the teacher or the student to have what they need in this matter, especially since the general condition of the country [in regard to SEN policy] is excellent … there is no unacceptably high density and thus teachers can do their job, even if they discover a case or two. (Ishaaq, interviewed 2003)

This perspective reflects a strong, explicit support for the political status quo, but one which, simultaneously diminishes the needs of the disabled and the complexity of the problems SEN provision may pose. Conflicting discourses exist, as do distinct ideologies, but they are not currently expressed in coherent or organized policy-affecting groups. Conflict is thus driven underground, and arrives in policy at lower levels, either through incorporating available resources (Salwa, interviewed 2003), and then very indistinctly, as pragmatic uses of available human resources.

7.5.1: The dependent bead threads of Omani education policy-making

One effect of this unique Omani political landscape is the shape of the space where policy is formed. In the UK there is a broad space with many arenas on most – but not all – occasions, with consultation and pressure and redrafting being part of the political process and thus the policy process itself. The Omani space, by contrast, is narrower and its navigation is not yet a practiced art.

> Nothing happens [with regards to policy discussion] unless we are called upon to go to Al Wafa or Al Amal [the special school for the deaf] to give lectures … only then is this matter offered for discussion. (Salwa, interviewed 2003)

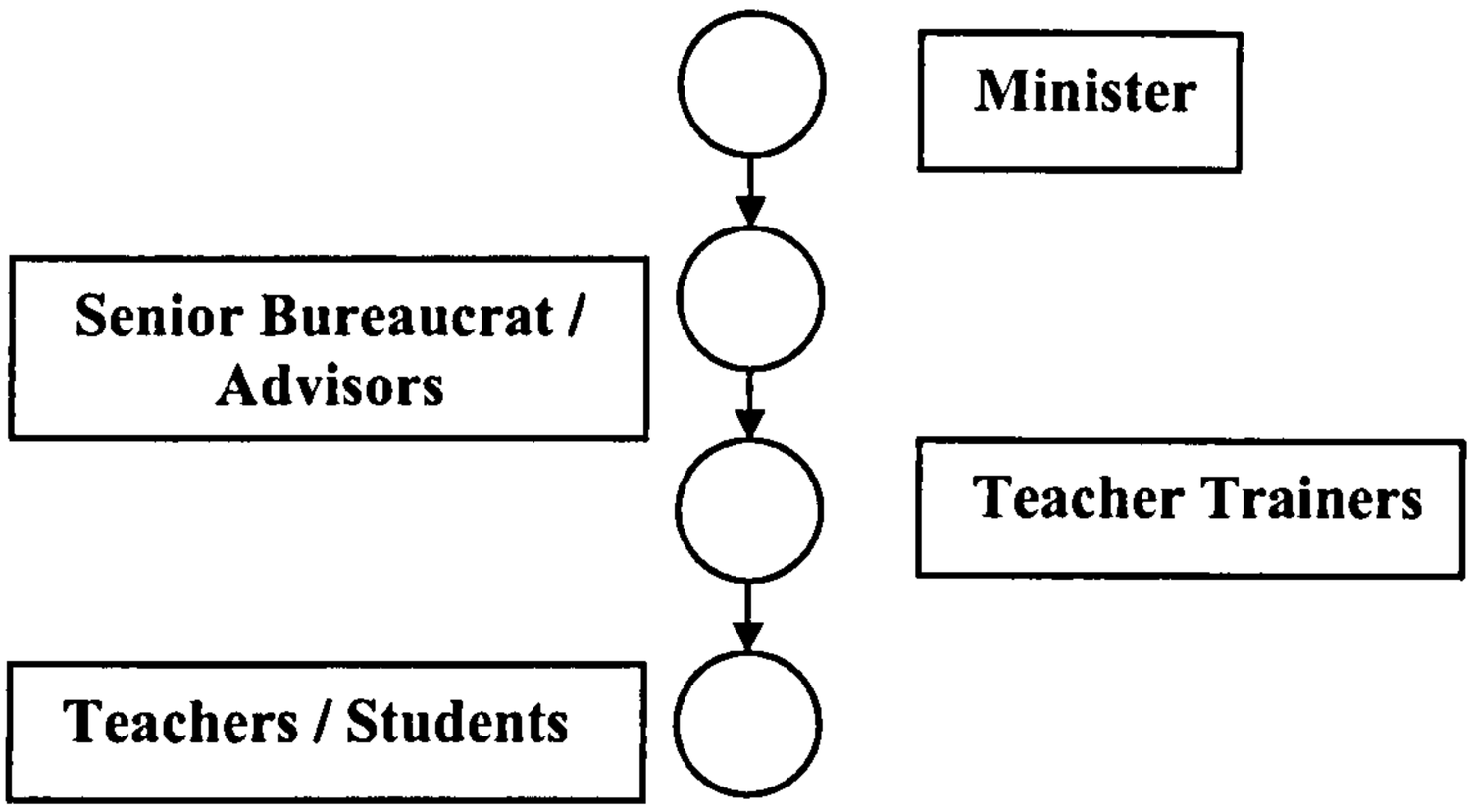
The education policy space is narrowed, not by caveat, but rather by group preference to exclude SEN from the agenda. As Salwa goes on to admit, "Oman is stuck within a certain time frame and curriculum" – and this helps fix the education agenda. Policy discussion is there to serve what already exists: what already exists is further strengthened by policy discussion. Hussain sees this as a generic Arab problem.

> You can buy weapons, you can sell oil, but how much [of the budget] ends up in the ministries [and eventually] how much is allocated to students, according to whatever policy they [at the top] see as useful, with good standards or not … what exactly is the policy? What is the education policy? The policy for the disabled? … I cannot tell you while you are recording. (Hussain, interviewed 2003)

Instead of a web of different tensions between different power bases, Oman has developed a "hanging thread" system, with bureaucrats spaced like beads down the thread, and the teacher or pupil as the final depending bead.

The directionality of policy – its pressure – is always downwards; there is very limited feedback; attitudes to senior members of the hierarchy are determined by the policy pressures exerted from above them; the final dependent policy bead – the SEN teacher or student or parent – feels the weight of policy but not the possibility of personal input. Ozga (2000) and Ball (1990a) are frequently insightful, but their analyses focus on non-autocratic national settings where the power generated by tradition is balanced with other interests and dynamics. Policy in Oman exists most frequently as systems of bead threads, unconnected among themselves, and controlled by the originating bureaucracies and the inevitable gravitational pull made up of tradition, conceptual limitations, limited information, and the habits of acceptance or complaisance which may be functions of the very short period of Omani modernity.

Figure 7. 1: Dependent bead thread – each circle represents one policy layer or centre of power, pressing down on the next. As the arrows show, the flow of policy-making is unidirectional



Therefore policy is filtered rather than generated, altered, restructured and redrawn; it is filtered always with an eye to the dependency of the thread system. The higher up the thread, the more keenly dependency is felt, and the less complex policy-making becomes. Pragmatic and economic elements obscure the political in this system introducing inertia and strengthening the status quo.

All systems of all governments suffer inertia at various levels and for various reasons. In Oman however stasis is the theme rather than the interruption.

> The actual curricula for learning difficulties are very insufficient, there is only one such curriculum, and we try hard to find our way using it to benefit some people in special education … [these are] unilateral methods. (Mubarak, interviewed 2003)

There is no dynamic debate – instead there is a continual, internal and usually only implicit examination of the position the middle and lower professionals occupy in the way they deliver what policy there is.

> The problem is that the university when they made a survey [of SEN] they concluded that the community does not need [provision] – and here is the problem. Do the teachers prepare well in a way to serve the marketplace and meet the country's requirements? Or should they meet the requirements of the local community? Or [should they do] what they are told? In this regard we find many teachers having many weaknesses because they are not basically prepared by TTCs. (Hamed, interviewed 2003)

Something more explicit is exampled by bureaucratic professionals who have exchanged uncertainty and doubt for certainty and rigidity. There is little overt "struggle over policy" (Ball, 1990a: 11), and the tensions between power and resistance (Foucault, 1990: 95) are expressed as the easy repetition of clichéd phrases which seem to owe their origins partly to government documents and partly to their readings of the interviewer's own agenda.

> We should set programmes and form establishments … there should be a clear educational plan with defined objectives, with people paving the way. We should not look at the visible disabilities but rather find solutions through an educational plan based on solid ground. We should give the disabled child the chance to do something. I wish here to thank you for selecting this matter. I think this is a key effort to take Oman into the Twenty-First century. (Samir, interviewed 2003)

See chapter 1.1 for an examination of the socio-political context which may, in part, be responsible for this stasis.

A lack of explicit contradiction between the different social levels within the educational structure – the lack of any meaningful struggle – means that the smallest but most dominant group, the political elite, maintain the boundaries of all essential discourse:

little that is meaningful is therefore generated within the education policy-making establishment – the tendency is to mimic developments elsewhere.

> Some students from the Al Amal school who gain high marks, they feel they are active enough and can send them to Kuwait for scholarships … our masters colleagues in Jordan are recording the texts they bring [here]. It is a beginning. (Dunya, interviewed 2003)

One thing Omani education policy is responding to is an increase in (or an increased perception of, or a real increase in) a perceived need for social change; but this response is inadequate to the task.

> I think nothing [about my current environment]. We receive the courses from the Ministry, even if we have an opinion sometimes about these courses or their modification our opinions are ignored. … Those in charge of the [policy on] curriculum have the greater role to play … but the change never arrives in the way we want. … We don't expect it now. (Salwa, interviewed 2003)

One response seems to be to retreat into tacit acceptance of this failed policy approach of passing down policy without any feedback. However, people in teacher training like Salwa keep writing "to the ministry", they present – for this context – a remarkable tenacity, and this indicates there exists a struggle for change which goes on despite the implacability of the dependent bead threads, or perhaps because of them. Finally no socio-political systems are stable, there is always systemic change; the speed, depth and type of change may be difficult to assess, but just as the dependent bead thread analogy is a useful model for this snapshot of Omani educational trends in 2005 there should be no reason to consider it a permanent state of affairs – "trends cannot go on forever, because

they hit asymptotes" (Wallerstein, 2003: 59). Struggle will create change in educational provision.

> [In] the long-run "democratization" of the political machineries throughout the history of the modern world-system have served to make the curve of the political strength of the working classes an upward one over the *longue durée* in virtually all states in the world-system. (Wallerstein, 2003: 60)

Already Noora (interviewed 2001) has noted some exceptions to the dependent bead thread analogy – with some pressure from disabled groups on senior bureaucrats like herself (see chapter 4.4), but this was the only reference to any kind of lobbying in the data set.

7.5.2: Discourses and developments

Instead of a struggle between different levels, there is something of a clash between different discourses (as discussed in chapter 6.3) – for instance medical and professional discourses. A clear question – implicit in many of the interviews – was one of legitimating discourse.

> When a seminar is held, a lot of opportunities arise and many doors are opened and we expose ourselves to various expertise and exchanges of knowledge and then the problems can be easily redressed with new ideas. … I think the country gives more attention [to those with SEN]. We can make out this from what we see in the schools which sent individuals to the college … there is remarkable attention. (Ishaaq, interviewed 2003)

Policy emerges in a reaction to the articulation by those various interests – teachers, teacher trainers, academics, business and religious leaders – who make up the professional class.

One very basic way education policy may be constructed in the Omani model is through the professional-pragmatist discourse; this simply asks "what are the limits of the possible" in terms of budgets, resources and time, and then, using models from elsewhere, fits provision accordingly. This is not to say that the Omani education system is some autonomous monolith that blunders on under the force of its own weight against the inertia and powerlessness of weaker groups. One must be careful of constructing a simplistic system, remembering Hargreaves's comment about "multicausal, pluralistic conflict, administrative complexity and historical inertia" (Hargreaves, 1983: 14).

The collision of old and new interests – or old and new discourses surrounding old and new habits and ideologies – delineate the field of policy change and is a new force acting as yet almost invisibly on the policy bead thread systems.

> In our communities we always ignore mistakes – so what if we have a big idea and want to try it out? There are going to be negative reactions to the disabled person or their family … they [the disabled and their families] are rejected or ostracized. But there should be an effective re-think – we should encourage parents to accept disabilities and give out information about disability … there should be cooperation. (Basma, interviewed 2003)

But also

> [W]e should know the varieties of disability and what causes them and then protect society before the problem occurs. (Basma, interviewed 2003)

Just as ideological changes in 1960s UK (Tomlinson, 2001: 16) shaped and projected policy practice – especially under the 1964-1970 Labour government – so there have been subtle shifts ideologically in Oman in the period since 1970 (see chapter 1.1). The ideological changes in the UK expressed a consensus: "the principle that a democratic society should educate all its young people rather than selected elites, and that modern economies needed more and better educated people" (Tomlinson, 2001: 16). This led to the implementation of comprehensive education, which had been there in philosophical if not political embryo in the 1944 Education Act, and the creation of the Open University. However, ideological changes are dependent on many variables – economic, political, demographic – and tend to run in cycles linked to business changes and elections (Alesina and Sachs, 1988; Nordhaus, 1989). The move to greater equity in the 1960s was, in some measure, reversed (at least philosophically) by the 1979-1997 Conservative government, which sought, on the US model, to re-legitimize elites. Oman does not have the same cycles or political vicissitudes – but nonetheless policy does reflect ideological shifts which are dependent on variables such as economic growth and the use of expatriate labour.

One of the clearest motivations to policy – and one which sidelines SEN as irrelevant, problematic and counterproductive – is the view that education in general is very much a process linked to the economic wellbeing of the state.

> We need to see what problems are faced [by those with SEN] – it is educational problems and … job performance and therefore wider social harmony. … How to help [those with SEN] … avoiding negative repercussions. (Basma, interviewed 2003)

> Until recently we could do little – but there needs to be big change, complete change … although things cannot change overnight we need to work hard … Oman is developing and growing … the economic situation is positive. (Zaid, interviewed 2003)

This "investment in human capital" (Giddens, 1998: 117) links education directly to the needs of employers – via a state which sees education merely as an investment (Woodward, 1997) – and sometimes results in a narrow and divisive educational aim.

> The disabled person [must] think of the future … there are economic needs. We should think how to provide them with a fair livelihood. The law should stipulate that businesses employ five percent disabled workforce … we need to ease financial burdens on families. (Loai, interviewed 2003)

The effect of "easing burdens on families" is really easing potential burdens on the state. Since Oman is developing its post-oil economic sectors (Mansur and Treichel, 1999) and removing dependency on expatriate labour this informs a deeper ideology, feeding into educational policy, which is one that sees the job of education as being a pragmatic apparatus, a job which in line with other sectors, should help develop a unique Omani practice. It is not difficult to see how problematically SEN fits with this policy paradigm. Policy splits into three basic approaches: education as an economic tool (linked to the idea of education as investment, (Woodward, 1997)); education as a national/social identity tool; education as a right. These three aspects of policy are realized as a new level of awareness and sympathy.

> [In Oman] it is generally a sympathetic and positive attitude [towards those with SEN] and we ought to help. Views have changed as awareness increases, before there was little parental awareness, but now things have changed and … the system is more humane. … We understand society better. … [and] the community is more educated. (Shaima, interviewed 2003)

It has already been described how Oman, like most Gulf, many Arab and other developing states, does not develop education policy in a multi-layered, consultative, profession-oriented or culture-specific manner. Education policy is dictated by bureaucrats and events – variables such as economic success or change. It is articulated in ministerial five-year plans, documents which may owe some elements of their construction to specialist input, perhaps through committees or consultation. What are the real influences on such documents? These may be the way other Arab or Western states are developing their policies in similar areas. What is the influence of globalization on the educational discourses – specifically the power complement – in Oman? Is there evidence of a new professional elite, a caste without true national identity, which looks elsewhere not just for inspiration, nor even for guidance, but for the deeper stuff of education policy? (Reich, 1991: 303)

> I did workshops in Libya and I attended international and Arab conferences [on SEN policy] … we now have some direction, we have curricula, teaching methods for kids with special needs … and now there are plans for inclusion … we can help here … frankly, the government is doing its best [despite] the problem of a lack of research. (Hussain, interviewed 2003)

Hussain, an educational psychologist, works as a thoughtful member of the education system, yet his concept of policy guidance flops between sycophancy and vagueness. In

this there may, in fact, be a significant reflection of Oman's policy structure in the concepts of a non-Omani.

> The emerging reality resulting from a global economy appears to encourage the creation of a global social class structure, which mimics national social structures. These are highly educated and qualified global elites, often educated internationally, whose background and privilege guarantee them permanent employment, income and wealth. (Tomlinson, 2001: 161)

Tomlinson suggests, by implication, that developing countries may simply become feeders of global capitalism in terms of educated labour. Those with SEN may, in this way, suffer the consequences of an educational policy driven to extremes: nationalism, globalization, and those who cannot work for either camp – the undereducated, the very poor, and those with disabilities.

It should be remembered first that Oman is neither politically as multi-levelled nor as open to dialogue as Western societies: its identity is increasingly bound up with perceptions of tradition. It is a small, hierarchically-determined society, currently being encouraged, top-down (see chapter 1.1) to develop consultative processes (Chatty, 1996: 164). Whether this development will occur in the short or long term, or be a troubled transformation (Chami, 1999: 46) or be stalled in unforeseen ways (Martey, 1999: 17) is yet to be seen. Education policy, under such circumstances, is negotiated in convoluted ways. Some, like Hussain, seem to rely on spontaneous eruptions of policy from grass roots level – perhaps as an excuse for no real policy initiative emerging from the elite – or a chance to copy foreign education policy directions.

> There is change, but … we need everyone's help. In [my state] there are institutes, private schools … there is support from Zakat [private] funds, from companies, here we want the same. I think the community should do something, like the things we hear about in Bahrain. (Hussain, interviewed 2003)

Others display a slightly more complex conception of policy.

> Naturally the issue of those with special needs is a good thing and everyone can play their role [dictated by government] policy with proper training. (Ishaaq, interviewed 2003)

But then the conception of appropriate policy seems to take on an almost utilitarian dimension.

> The [SEN] policy itself is not bad especially if the students are willing to work, and we have access to those who drew up the policy [but] changes should conform to the environmental situation and social and economic status of the students. (Ishaaq, interviewed 2003)

Finally, there is comfort gained from asserting that policy works.

> There are challenges but mainly attributable to economic factors, for the education side it is easy. (Ishaaq, interviewed 2003)

Ishaaq's split policy personality suggests that all is rosy in the government's policy garden, but then tacitly admits to problems with those students "unwilling to work" in the system; finally this is brushed aside by the statement that "education … is easy". Government education policy here is something an expatriate teacher trainer can hide behind rather than seek to change. The presence of non-Omanis may, in this way, slow change rather than encourage it.

7.6: Policy arenas

There is communication between what Fulcher (1999: 3) calls "arenas" – that is fields of discrete knowledge and activity – and government policy-makers. In the UK this might mean specialist professional and experiential input during the political process. But in Oman education policy and implementation are in most senses identical: policy fits inside implementation, which in turn constrains the policy it contains. Communication between Ministries as policy originators and senior levels of SQU's teacher training college and the TTCs is poor, and implementation is perceived as something quite different from the original policy aims. This is policy as status quo and policy as muddle – or policy as dictat.

> I don't think there are any clear policies in terms of the available curricula, though we are encouraged [to offer] practical sessions [for teacher trainees] outside the university … this is not obligatory it is elective and there is not much turn out. We did not fail to promote this side and I don't see the situation as a failure … after agreeing on a programme it was referred to the college council and after that ... we faced problems from individuals who wanted a feasibility study. … We called the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Social Development and received no answers [except] they were not interested in the teaching programme but they would like a Psychological Guidance programme … because social workers do not carry out their duties properly. (Younnis, interviewed 2003)

There is little extensive discursive procedure across and between arenas and the policy centre which, in Western societies, hides or disguises the power relationship between political sources and political goals. For Oman, and specifically for the people involved in teacher education and SEN, the question is not "where is the political discourse centred?" since that, clearly, is with the head of state, but rather what is the intermediate

process between the determination of policy and its construction or delivery? Visible power in Oman tends to be concentrated within bureaucracies, though there is an attempt to devolve education policy and policy-making and extend profession access. Evidence suggests that power is not diffused, but rather there is a culture that not only expects policy input from above, but is wary of alternatives. Education policy is thus a reflection of the "unhealthy" and non-porous nature of a bureaucratized class (Gramsci, 2003: 189) written on borrowed models (see chapters 6.2 / 6.3) without significant consultation, and with a concentration on the superficialities of budgetary concepts.

> Training policies … should be [concentrated] on courses as per the facilities available … what facilities we have are guided by what budgets exists … it would be better to minimize the number [of trainees]. (Basma, interviewed 2003)

What the Omani system produces is not an overburdening number of education policies, but rather a discursive vacuum – there is no "struggle" to create policy (Fulcher, 1999: 7) but instead atomization: each respondent has formed their own conceptual universe (Basma's dominated by budgetary constraints, Hussain's by a perception that whatever government does is good), unconnected to others with similar views; there are rarely references to other professionals (though Hussain does refer to the work of Dunya), the self is all. Institutional conditions for policy are unique to Oman: often central institutions (ministries for example) are hardly perceived or felt, except at a superficial level (Fulcher, 1999: 50). Ministries are criticized only tangentially though there is some criticism of the system.

> Unless we have some kind of workable policy the [SEN] situation will get worse. (Riad, interviewed 2003)

The respondents – at least in the main tranche of interviews – are not people directly associated with the structuring of policy at the highest level: instead, they represent the core of an educational policy implementation in its pseudo-political and technical aspects.

But within education the autocratic-patriarchal structure does not generate policy, though it may guide, retard or expedite it. What seems to matter most, to respondents such as Riad and Zaid, is not the ultimate authority or even the policy complexion of the state but rather the interaction between their own political / moral theories and the practice as it exists or could exist. It is a personal attitude to policy – one not determined by hegemonic structures, but one determined by a theoretical archipelago where individual ideas have some policy effects – teacher trainers inculcate practice in novice and trainee teachers – but then this delays changes in classrooms often not fiercely monitored and regulated. Policy then devolves to individual teachers and teaching hierarchies and local populations, and is determined by contingencies – the weather, poor classroom conditions, large classes, lack of teaching equipment or funds – and finally meets questions which fail to be answered, and evaporates.

> Why don't we add special courses [on to] the current courses … why don't we introduce a diploma for those involved … why don't we link the centres that educate those with SEN to the Ministry of Education … why don't we have a [Braille] press … there are no funds.(Adil, interviewed 2003)

The institutional conditions in developing states may mirror, to a certain extent, those in developed states, but this does not mean that those conditions will affect education policy – or create and sustain it – in the same way. Although a few respondents refer, tangentially very occasionally to policy in the EU, US, Jordan, Iraq and elsewhere, there is a strong sense that domestic institutional structures – political systems, education ministries, SQU, TTCs, schools – cannot sustain those policy initiatives aimed at helping students with SEN.

To use Fulcher's (1999: 49) classification of a clash between two policy discourses, there is evidence of a preference for professional rather than democratizing discourse (see chapter 6.5): there appears to be a preference for the patriarchal/professional over the microcosmic discourses represented by individuals, a mixture of lay and other discourses not always favourable to SEN.

One clear discourse shared by respondents was their concept of dependency. Seeing the disabled as dependent rather than independent (Ball, 1990) is easier, and complies more simply with dominant ideological structures (see chapter 6.3.1). The fact that students with SEN are doubly dependent because of age and disability puts them firmly into the centre of the dependency arena.

> The political sphere ... plays a significant role in the social creation of dependency amongst disabled people in terms of both its legislative enactments and the way it conducts its discourse about policy. Further, it lays the foundations for the ideological climate within which services are provided and professional practice carried out. (Oliver, 1990: 89)

7.7: Corruption or confusion – policy as struggle

As has already been described, all policy involves some element of struggle – the more innovative the policy the greater the struggle will be. The more innovative the more complex will be both the implementation and the reception of policy – and of course its creation. This complexity brings with it a potential corruption or distortion of policy – changing both its shape and its effects. Fulcher (1999: 53) suggests that policy is struggle. "Since policy is struggle there is always more than one concern or objective contending with others in its production. … Since policy is political practice and politics characterizes all practices, policy is made at all levels in educational apparatuses." (Fulcher, 1999: 231) This description may not be theoretically adequate to developing models – and specifically to the Omani model – and avoids a return to the "gap" model criticized by Fulcher (1999:231) but rather defines policy-making in terms of disjunction, examined in chapter 8, concepts which have a different orientation.

While it may be reasonable to suggest that, in the US for example, education policy is developed at a number of levels (Mehan, 1983: 188; 1984) creating reaction and some inadequacies because of theoretical paucity and because of the depth of social division, in Oman education policy specifically exists in two almost separate levels. Omani society may not experience the extremes of exclusion used in the US to facilitate policy (Chomsky, 2000), but education policy *is* separated between two bead levels in the depending system: the world of government policy, which is clearly demarcated, and the world of middle-ranking bureaucratic policy implementation. The lower bead levels are occupied by teacher trainers, university teachers, school administrators and teachers

themselves, levels which exist in a theoretically impoverished state, without forums for joint expression, joined only by the flow of policy transmission. This education policy-making results in policy that is frozen in moments of partial perception, perhaps when an individual finished thinking about SEN, or when they fitted what they knew into a workable model of SEN provision. When, as now (Ministry of Education, 2004) SEN policy is created, it slips down the bead thread changing little on the way, and creating an effect which may be workable but has not been effected by real change. This workability is at times contradictory: government education policy is adequate but the "problem" of SEN provision needs addressing.

> There is no particular criticism [of government policy] the courses are general without getting into details so we will not have the required results which we want in order to qualify a specialized teacher which is not important for the primary stage and it is also important to start addressing the problem [throughout Oman] before it gets any worse. (Basma, interviewed 2003)

Fitting the awkward stuff of human beings with special needs into a model of society is often a task which exposes real agendas.

> We should change, it should be the policy to [change] this name "disabled", and actually see what problems they face. [Are they] educational problems? Then we should look at the job performance and overall social harmony … for example, how to help the kid without making him feel that he is disabled and so [we can] avoid any negative repercussions. (Basma, interviewed 2003)

This is a linear approach to education policy-making; the political profile of the disabled, according to Basma, is better removed "to avoid negative repercussions", but repercussions for whom? The person with SEN or those charged with their care and

education? Repercussions suggest struggle and the concomitant need to adjust policy, complications which are best avoided.

> We should protect society before the problem takes place. (Basma, interviewed 2003)

Implicit worries regarding the fragility of the education system are expressed in terms of conservative need to prevent change. The concern is not with the political needs of those with SEN, but with the political demands of the state.

> There should be funds and budgets and there should be specialized and experienced people, there should be more attention to the subject, we should think how to make this category … useful not a burden on the community. Most … become a burden on the community. Unattended … other social problems will arise … we should avoid such problems. (Basma, interviewed 2003)

Basma's paradigm may be typically psychomedical in that it relies on specialists in psychology and medicine, sees SEN as an illness, and worries about infection; but it has interesting policy ramifications. She fears creep – the process by which "invisible disabilities" (Basma, interviewed 2003) will enter the system and disturb it. In this context all disabilities should be thoroughly diagnosed and then segregated. Her concern is not one of adequate SEN provision, but one of keeping disabilities away from the mainstream. Yet this is not a clearly expressed idea – elsewhere she is positive about educating parents and preparing teachers. The struggle going on here is between the tidy paradigm of segregation, where the messes and complications entailed by integration are avoided, and the developing paradigm of wider social education which "avoids problems". At best this is confused simplification, a struggle between conflicting

concepts of SEN and society; at worst it is segregationalism. The concept of separation as an expression of education policy, the apartheid concept of management according to segregation based on, in the case of disablement, a better or worse approximation to the norm: a consensualized image of the human body that takes the historical struggle to identify and control into the earliest definitions of the individual. Those who fail the test of approximation are shunted aside, and the shunting is excused either as natural or exigent, or both.

> Because it is just [the] curriculum, there is no attention in this regard, but there are plans and desires … we are normally more sympathetic with these matters and feel they are part of ourselves. We are simply [to teach those with SEN] as we teach the normal students, but we don't have the means to teach the abnormal student, whether they are superior in their abnormality or not, but we don't have problems, the problems are only in the surrounding circumstances. (Naader, interviewed 2003)

Here the deeper philosophical struggle is clear: on one side "we have no problems", on the other, "we don't have the [educational] means". Struggle is denied legitimacy and resolves itself at first and in the instance of the interviews into confusion; in terms of policy development, struggle is more likely to resolve itself in committees and advisory groups – which are mostly male, and have strong internal links of professionalism – into simplistic or exclusive policy solutions. Education policy-making becomes problem solving rather than constructive or adventurous.

> The more amiability or esprit de corps among the members of a policy-making in-group, the greater is the danger that independent critical thinking will be replaced by groupthink, which is likely to result in irrational and dehumanizing actions directed against out-groups. (Jarvis, 1972: 13)

Although Jarvis is talking about high-level government policy-making, nonetheless his observation should be born in mind when remembering the fragility of many respondent's sympathies for SEN provision, and the strengths of their allegiance to the status quo and simple solutions. The "out-group" – the disabled in this case – must always suffer when professionals gather to make or advise on policy in a situation of political immaturity or uncertainty.

7.8: Conclusion

Policy-making is a complex dialectical process, but unlike other processes such as debate, consultation or reporting, policy-making exists as a result of a series of relationships between those who make decisions and those willing to receive the results of decision-making. Power is thus a result of willing engagement – and the more willing the engagement the more the implacability of the status quo, the less the likelihood of policy developing from struggle or contention.

In Oman, the education policy-making machine appears more like a series of separate policy pulses, each one passing down the dependent bead thread until the final bead – the school, teachers, pupils and parents – is reached. Pressure is almost exclusively top/down; the object of policy making is to affect the final bead – the school, the teacher, the student – in some predictable way; there is little feedback; the dependency of each bead on the one above prevents adequate debate or change to the policy flow.

What / who does education policy serve? Unsurprisingly, struggle is almost absent from the interviewees' conceptualization of education itself. Only two stand out – Noora among the preliminary interviews of chapter 4, and Shaima, both women – as respondents whose attitudes are different and critical enough to be part of an alternative democratizing discourse about SEN. There is among respondents like Maher, Saif or Ishaaq a willingness – even a desire – to avoid the political or "depoliticize" (Warnock, 1982: 56) and maintain the educational status quo. Since "all educational practices are political" (Fulcher, 1999: 53) what this means in practice is ideological conservatism, retreat and dismissal: "SEN is a simple category" (Salwa, interviewed 2003); and the need to "avoid wrong concepts" (Saif, interviewed 2003) indicate a wish for clarity, perhaps even a desire that policy-making not be corrupted by external influences. This desire to retain the status quo is itself a struggle to make sense of a policy system which does not fit educational needs. The technical issues of teaching (what, how, whom and where to teach) are reduced to simplicities to exclude awkward politicizing complexities – SEN, and the teacher training needed to support its provision, is too challenging.

Thus this chapter has identified a hierarchic model as predominant (Ozga, 2000), a model of education provision which depoliticizes and denies debate. The model is generated by an autocratic education system which, by its nature, perpetuates the dependent bead thread pulsing of policy implementation. The autocratic education system may, unwittingly, deny the natural adjustments of policy to fit purposes, creating those "spaces between purposes" (Ozga, 2000: 10) which then help perpetuate patchwork policy and

maintain the dependent bead thread system.

A question of conflict resulting from policy (Fulcher, 1999: 142) arises from the occasion when, the more an education policy is imposed without consultation, the further the originators of implementation are from the objects of their policy – those with SEN – both in terms of real distance and ideological division, the more likely it is that policy will increase rather than resolve or avoid conflict. Consensus is not deep because effective communication is often frustrated, poorly achieved between different arenas of education policy (Fulcher, 1999).

One illustration of the unique nature of Omani education policy growth is demonstrated by Wright Mills' (1970) observation that personal or individual troubles or difficulties – caused or exacerbated by the pedagogic system – shift into public policy issues. This shift is essentially a shift from the personal anecdotal discourse of some respondents (notably Zaid, interviewed 2003) towards a perception of students from the top down; Dunya (interviewed 2003) suggests that those with SEN do not have rights, but may be "allowed" to enjoy the educational facilities. This policy, however well-meaning, transports disablement into an abstraction, and then back into an issue to be dealt with by policy. Wright Mills may have Western, welfare societies in mind, but his observation is of the essence of policy, affecting everyone involved. Teacher trainers are no longer referring to a collection of differentiated cases but, rather, to a category created by and then all too conveniently served by a policy. (Mehan et al, 1981; 1983)

Among the respondents, there is a frozen record of this shift from experience into education policy determined elsewhere. As this shift occurs categorization dominates, and those paradigms described in chapter 6, and by Tomlinson (1982) and Brissenden (1986) and Fulcher (1999: 163-164) of the psychomedical and meritocratic, take on a peculiar dynamic. In Oman the process from undifferentiated education to policy has been so swift that all the layers of change have appeared, fossilized in the interview record. However, where welfare states' attempt within their policy to maintain a pedigree of individual rather than categorized care – by the nature of the basic philosophy – Oman is a state where the dominant education ideology is not welfare-driven, but stretched between old patriarchal and new commercial interests. This is not an ideological environment to nurture education policy in anything but a functional way: how will policy feed the modern state's needs? In this situation individual troubles with provision of state services are not shifted towards being public issues but rather are abruptly reordered. Teacher trainers and therefore teachers must suffer the abruptness and dislocation of this reordering (Al Belushi, 2003).

> The shift to frameworks which can examine issues as public is the hallmark of the sociological imagination … but these social theoretical platforms are contentious: they raise issues of power and … the institutional bases of professions. Nevertheless, such platforms are critically relevant to formulating better policy if our objective is educational equity. (Fulcher, 1999: 348)

The discourses apparent in the interviews disclose the power arrangements reflected in teacher education in Oman in 2003. Power is present in pedagogy but in an unusually cloistered way, while also generated and reordered by policy. Sometimes it may be

disguised as the usual, the acceptable application of policy; sometimes it may be revealed as the exigencies of a state faced with urgent post-oil priorities. Essentially power is exercised to define and refine definitions of those who may not fit adequately into the pedagogic and social discourses of the interviewees: those with disablement may well be there to encourage good deeds from the faithful, but their presence is not therefore a political determination. Education policy generates some strange inconsistencies, disjunctions which act to baffle and halt the extension not only of SEN provision, but also distort the wider Omani education system.

CHAPTER 8: ANALYSIS PART 3 - DISJUNCTION

This chapter examines those areas in SEN and teacher training where education policy does not fit the concepts that are articulated by interviewees. Although there are references to Western policy analyses these are made to offer a theoretical background not to suggest that the UK experience may be helpful in the very different Omani context. If there are discursive shifts taking place in Oman, these may not necessarily occur along lines experienced elsewhere.

Specifically the disjunctions that will be explored are:

(1) **Between education policy-making and policy implementation** – the obscurity of policy purposes; the lack of synchronicity and the apparently gratuitous nature of Omani policy – policy objectives decoupled and pursued for the sake of making policy; the struggle between policy-making and implementation – the flow down the dependent policy bead thread - creates disjunction;

(2) **Disconnection of education personnel from their relevant bureaucracies** – a managerial deficit;

(3) **Lack of interactivity between and through levels of teacher training and pedagogy** – a disconnection of people operating exclusively in their own territories;

(4) **A deficit of natural alliances** – for example between teacher trainers and academics;

(5) **Disjunction between theory/concepts and education policy** – little "interactivity" (Hindess, 1986: 120); concepts and policy occupy different realities;

(6) **Gaps between needs and education policies** - between what teacher trainers express and the facts of policy-making; lack of links between educational needs and policy provision;

(7) **Poor fit between education policy and educational institutions** or between policy and policy target – the child with SEN;

(8) **Abandonment** – Policy struggle leaves certain arenas, such as teacher training for SEN, untouched;

(9) **Policy existing mostly as reaction, not process;**

(10) **The patchwork provision of education policy;**

(11) **The disjunction between familiar and unfamiliar educational territories;**

(12) Uniting all these are **the disjunctions experienced because of poor communication** – between the beads of the dependent bead thread, and between different threads.

The examination of disjunction in this chapter is not just about the "cracks" between policy-making and implementation (Ozga, 2000: 113) but more crucially about the disjunction between more fundamental policy processes (Ozga, 2000: 94; Ball, 1993). Disjunctions may occur systemically (Tilly, 1990) or systematically and be worsened as competing discourses in a rapidly changing world create incoherence. This chapter does not seek to examine those errors of education policy interpretation, implementation, design or omission that occur in every state: it looks to examine the unique nature of a developing country where the class that determines education policy appears, to those key personnel interviewed, to be disconnected to some extent from ideas about education,

and that this in turn means a disjunction between what people "understand" as education policy – what SEN students are entitled to, for instance – and what actually is expressed as practice.

8.1: The nature of disjunction

It is understandable, even sometimes useful, to conceive of policy-making occurring within constraints (Jones, 1983: 241), limits which set the extent and depth and kind of policy as it develops. The research results suggest there are constraints of precedent and practice. Due to the relatively short period of Omani modernization (see chapter 1.2) there is a lack of experience of education governance in Oman. In a developing nation state where both precedent and practice are weak, education policy will reflect these social and economic contexts. In an educationally autocratic context where policy is a top-down process, unmediated by struggle and contestation, there may well be disjunction between what teachers regard as essential and what policy-makers consider "the best way forward". For example, in Oman, the education professionals making up the 18 respondents of these analysis chapters express concern about what they see as a disjunction between current policy and the needs of students with SEN.

8.1.1: The process of disjunction

One basic problem is that policy-making and policy-implementation are not refined processes: there are as yet no "deep transformative" effects (Armstrong, 2004) because of a lack of a system of collaboration and consultation. The objectives of Omani education

policy are sometimes obscure – an obscurity which may be a general conceptual/policy disjunction (Fulcher, 1999: 49). Sometimes such procedural obscurity can appear to be neglect of teacher trainers and teacher training courses.

> There is [no established SEN policy] nothing … there is no particular attention [paid by policy-makers] and the courses in general are therefore [weak] … so what do we do? We don't have the solutions to the problems that we need, that we seek in order to qualify a teacher specialized [in SEN]. (Basma, interviewed 2003)

Basma expresses a sense of disconnection from the Ministry that directs education: objectives are unknown and therefore the courses provided for trainee teachers cannot adequately prepare them to meet the realities of SEN. What is explicit in Basma's responses is implicit elsewhere - Dunya, Naader, Ishaaq, and Maher all express levels of disconnection, but do not articulate this disconnection directly. The result of this disconnection of teacher trainers is less adequately prepared teachers.

Overall, education objectives may often be pursued because the numbers of disabled students create a policy imperative, because education is a prime social-regulatory tool, and because policy is an end in itself – a rationale which would fit with the dependent bead thread analogy articulated in chapter 7.5.1. The tactics developed to meet the objectives are therefore sometimes pedagogic, frequently psychomedical (see chapter 6.2.3), often ad hoc and driven by the bureaucratic/social structure. As among any teacher trainers there are mixtures of objectives and tactics – though what dominates is the autocratic mindset that follows an established education policy-making path, a social-technical process oblivious to interactivity: the downwards force of gravity on the beads

in the thread is the only policy pressure felt. The dialogue that generates theory and the pedagogic identity needed in teacher training is weak in this context. Hindess (1986) suggests theory drives policy which itself contains moral, political and technical aspects: reaching a decision should thus be a complex interactive process.

> The reaching of decisions involves the deployment of some discursive means whereby objectives, arguments and analyses are formulated, and in which the actor is located in relation to those objectives and decisions. (Hindess, 1986: 117)

With the dependent bead thread analogy in mind, discursive means are at a premium; across the Omani education policy arena, social actors spread a web of contradicting and sustaining alliances – "the intersections of consequences of specific practices and the conditions those practices sustain (or undermine)" (Hindess, 1986: 120-121) – but these alliances are disconnected from policy-making and policy enacting. In Oman, theory regarding pedagogy and specifically teacher training or the challenging area of SEN is limited and derivative; education policy therefore contains political and technical aspects, but few Oman-specific socially reactive processes.

> I feel we have no identity, what we have of policy is a flower from everyone else's garden. The education system in Oman should have a distinguished identity. … [Much] is not relevant and it is confusing. (Naader, interviewed 2003)

The problem is perceived as derivativeness – the sense that Omani education policy cobbles together bits and pieces from other states' policies, producing no distinct identity of its own, and generating educational provision that is potentially less relevant to the needs of its students. The process in Oman is often neither complex nor interactive, and

therefore Hindess's (1986) linked processes do not occur. Instead what exists is a system where theory and/or concepts exist independently of policy, because each is the territory of a different set of people – often people whose roles are mutually exclusive. This can, in turn, generate a feeling of desperation and incomprehension among teacher trainers.

> The problem is that we prepare the teacher in one way to enable him to deal in a normal class with the kids suffering from learning difficulties [but] why then don't we add special courses to this category along with the current courses? What is happening here? Why aren't things discussed? We should discuss. This is a suggestion, I don't claim it is the only way … why don't we introduce a diploma for those involved in the field, but not optional, it should be a prerequisite. [This is] an important point, why don't we attach the centres educating those with special needs to the Ministry of Education, then the teacher training will also be under the supervision of the Ministry? We could have links … .Why don't we? … I don't understand. (Adil, interviewed 2003)

Each education professional occupies their own arena, and experiences gaps between different policy beads differently; in some the experience creates a kind of conceptual panic, a plea that their suggestions – and they – be taken seriously. In the case of Adil the plea becomes almost apologetic: he feels what he is saying may be construed as criticism, and he takes care to wrap his observations – despite researcher assurances of anonymity – in caveats regarding personal innocence: "This is a suggestion, I don't claim it is the only way."

8.1.2: Ad hocism

This feeling of there being non-reactive policy-makers produces gaps between what professionals may express and what the government education policy offers – this gap is articulated as an *ad hocism* regarding SEN and teacher training.

[Any] teacher can help in the special schools [as long as] they are basically a teacher as there are no colleges graduating teachers with special needs interests. Is it necessary [to have] such colleges? We don't need to argue about this. Basically a special needs teacher [needs] some kind of experience and [to have taken] some courses and the country to give them the incentives. (Ishaaq, interviewed 2003)

This reticent, *ad hoc* view of SEN and teacher training reduces it to "some kind of experience and … some courses" plus government "incentives", whatever exactly these may be (Al Belushi, 2003 outlines the nature of Omani government fiscal and other incentives for teachers). Professionals and bureaucrats – or, more specifically, the education policy-making elite, see chapter 7.2 – are neither particularly synchronized nor interdependent: there are therefore significant disjunctions in the system. These disjunctions may be natural to *any* political system but where there is no practice in removing them, they become embedded and characteristic of the system in which they exist. Such disjunctions are likely to be inherited from bureaucratic generation to generation since power relationships and habits are less likely to be challenged by those working within, and thus dependent on, bureaucratized systems. If the dependent bead thread is an adequate analogy, it suggests that when beads are themselves renewed through replacement of personnel and continuing recruitment then this renewal will be unlikely to challenge the status quo, and, importantly, the spaces between the beads will remain untouched – perhaps will even be strengthened.

In the EU the struggle between democratization and professionalism defines and creates major aspects of education policy (Fulcher, 1999: 49), however in Oman analysis of this data suggests that policy may often drift between dictat and quiescence – Ishaaq

(interviewed 2003) is typical – and, frequently, results in indifference. The final beads in the dependent bead thread – a teacher trainer, teacher, student teacher, parent or pupil – are likely to perceive education policy as an abstraction, the motions of a distant, disconnected elite, irrelevant to their daily lives; an elite from which they may be, and often do feel excluded. In this particular circumstance, disconnection will be reflected in the *ad hoc* nature of policy. This exclusion from the realm of policy-making is not exclusively Omani or even developmental – few Europeans feel an intimate relationship with *their* policy-makers – what may be particular to the Omani education system is the widespread acceptance of political exclusion.

Education policy-making in Oman contrasts with the process documented in the Australian state of Victoria (Fulcher, 1999). In Oman's heavily bureaucratized society education policy may be pursued for its own sake, disconnected, *ad hoc* rather than being part of an operating policy structure. This is one possible scenario for Western states' foreign policies, particularly in the US, where populations fail to enjoy a complex awareness of policy issues and their contexts (Chomsky, 2003). In Oman, education five-year plans are part of a bureaucratic paperchase, serving mostly ministerial ends. Since conflict as the outward, expressed nature of education policy failure does not exist, the data suggests that the hidden nature of any conflict of ideas drives policy and concepts further apart – see Sara's (interviewed 2001) comments in chapter 4.1.2.

8.1.3: Policy fit

Any society has within it many actors – individuals and groups of individuals – and these form various levels of decision-making and express various discursive strengths. They are also identified not just at the levels they work – a ministry, university, school governors – but in the manner of formulation of policy. Should certain types of SEN be included, or is basic teacher training enough? Should a specific pedagogy be developed to cope? How is this to be *linked* to real change – or lack of change? It is this linkage (Hindess, 1986: 115) which is crucial in considering how effective or disrupted education policy itself may be.

Bielhartz (1987) suggests the need for *policy to fit* institutions. Policy fits when all interested parties struggle to get it to fit. The problem with SEN policy in Oman at the micro and macro level is that there is very little fit because there is no chance for interested parties to express themselves, and as Ishaaq's (interviewed 2003) reticence demonstrates, struggle is not a preferred habit. SEN policy may be generated but there is clearly no theoretical and/or institutional fit to generate meaningful effect. This lack of fit is closely observable in the way policy and its absence is articulated, and the way teacher trainers react to its implementation.

> [Current SEN policy] is very little, but [the teachers] are trying their best, because really the level of the curricula doesn't cover such a particular exercise or special education. This is just a small part regarding learning difficulties and how we can fit in different students. [Now] it is a bit unfair, but somehow [the teachers] recognize those of special needs. … There is not much discussion. (Salwa, interviewed 2003)

The policy vacuum – in terms of Western themes – does not produce an articulation of this "lack" from teachers or teacher trainers: instead of struggle there is recognition of powerlessness, a passive response, and some limited recognition of those with SEN – meaning, teachers try to do their best. The nature of the struggle of education policy, especially in autocratic or highly hierarchic models (Ozga, 2000: 2) is that the struggle – like all discursive collisions – leaves certain crucial areas outside the arena; areas which do not fit the dominant discourse. This may be because the struggle is systematized by the opponents, and it may be due to the simplified rules of the struggle. Certainly the more autocratic the education system, the more discursive disjunctions and lack of fit there are likely to be, if only because policy is formulated distantly and is not open to generative reinterpretation. However education policy struggle in Omani terms does not necessarily translate from or to similar activity in non-Arab, non-developmental states (see concluding remarks on policy struggles in chapter 8.5).

The perception of policy from within – as a system dominated by an autocratic education philosophy – is reflected in the ideologies of those affected by policy: in this sense disjunction is a mirror image, an inverse of the policy clarity intended. Disjunction may be systemic, but equally it can be wilful. It can be caused systemically or by those who might elsewhere be key to education policy reinterpretation, creation and implementation, and who feel they are excluded from the process.

The autocratic bind mentioned in chapter 7 – where appeal is sclerotic because of the one-way means of education policy communication down the dependent bead thread –

becomes key to maintaining the disjunction between policy and concepts. This disjunction would be unstable in the longer term and usually resolved in policy or conceptual alternations.

8.1.4: Resistant bureaucratic structures

The problem of disjunction also arises from the level of conceptualization, and the particular information available. Instead of feedback passing up the dependent bead thread, the initiating beads perceive disquiet remotely and act accordingly. This is not education policy as process but education policy as reaction.

> [Those at] the top are not taking decisions unless they feel pressure from [those at] the bottom. … They know [those at the bottom] are uneasy. … [There is] negativity due to an absence of information. (Zaid, interviewed 2003)

As power in the autocratic education system is drawn up rather than distributed, so the conceptual aspects of policy become disconnected from the reality of teacher training, classrooms and the presence of those with SEN. The dependent bead thread analogy may be particularly illustrative of what Ozga (2000: 10) calls "spaces between purposes"; here it may be applied to the Omani context as patchwork provision, another aspect of the disjunction between concepts and education policy.

Disjunction shows itself in Maher's disconnection – or his disconnecting, since he seems to be doing it himself – where the raw material of putative education policy is shuffled out of sight, knowing the result will be to hide rather than use that material.

We formed a sub-committee … and tried to create a database for special education … then we realized the importance of this area and concluded it was a project of four or five years in terms of [TTC] teaching and other requirements. … We forwarded the results [of the committee] to the colleges. (Maher, interviewed 2003)

His efforts appear to be easily frustrated, and the end result is to shuffle the results of the committee's deliberations across for others to consider and, possibly, deal with. Omani education policy practice, as described in chapter 7.2, is a simplifying system: policy is reduced to its repetitive essentials. On the one hand this allows policy-makers and bureaucrats a sense of relative success; on the other it potentially reveals the way acknowledged pedagogic/social concepts are only given lip-service: they never make it as far as *real* policy effects – results of enquiry or discussion are shuffled from location to location, arena to arena, and finally, presumably, lost.

The unconnectedness of some Omani public educational discourse – where policy is often comprised of vague plans – creates a barrier between what is publicly articulated by the relevant bureaucracies and what is carried out on the ground. This may be a reaction to involving disablement within an educational policy discourse. The reaction generates a barrier, recognized in the detachment of Naader who dismisses government education policy as bluster: the traditional method of obscuring disjunction.

Policy? [Where is] the work? [Where are] the results? … There is no proper attention in this regard, all we hear are plans and desires and possibilities and predictions. (Naader, interviewed 2003)

The articulation of "plans and desires" by bureaucrats is one way to relieve the pressure suggested by Zaid (interviewed 2003). Another aspect to disjunction is the human communicative problem, where concepts float free of policy or indeed of adequate planning, so those affected by policy feel either ignored at best or rejected as irrelevancies by some key education policy-makers. What are described (see chapter 7.2) as "cries from the policy wilderness", or by Zaid as "pressure", are effectively expressions of frustration at the disjunctions experienced.

8.1.5: Cracks between policy and implementation

The "cracks" between the formulating of policy and its implementation, between "intention and practice" (Wallace and Pocklington, 1998) are always most noticeable at those places where education policy is made, changed and put into practice – but in newly developing nations such as Oman it may well be that cracks actually become spaces of wilful incomprehension and personal resistance (Al Belushi, 2003), after a period of optimism (Hussain, interviewed 2003).

Policy at best should be an application of theoretical *comprehension*; what the Omani situation displays are early struggles with a range of educational ideas, practices and discourses – some familiar other less so, some very unfamiliar – which in some instances help maintain disjunction. Familiar practice in the case of all systems – educational and other – offers stability and comfort. The alternative – the new and unfamiliar – is not the natural territory for bureaucrats and teacher trainers existing as dependent beads on a

policy thread, struggling with their first exposure to advances in certain domains, such as SEN, and the first elements of professionalized policy-making.

The consequences of the dependent bead thread system of education policy-making is that the actual connection between the final bead and the initial bead, the connection which is the path of policy and the direction of policy influence, is only one of power dependency, not of any constructive refining of ideas. The dominant discourses are not empowering: the disjunction of teacher training and SEN provision from originating policy is partly a struggle between safe familiar and threateningly unfamiliar territories.

One thing which characterizes disjunction is the discursive cracks that appear between policy-making and policy implementation and the consequent inertia. Samir's experience (interviewed 2003) is typical of a preference for the familiar which locks out concepts such as SEN. In his position as a new non-Omani employee, hesitation and uncertainty are to be expected. However policy – which changes teacher training and adapts it to the needs of disablement – is weakened and disempowered by that fear of the unfamiliar.

> SEN is never discussed, no, not really. We don't talk about this at all … [we] don't know it. Only as an idea. … Even in our meetings of our unit or in the meetings of the [psychology] division. It is difficult. I have been here two years now in Oman, I did not hear or see any [SEN] circulars from the Ministry [of Education] or the Higher Education [Ministry] about that. (Samir, interviewed 2003)

SEN may not yet be part of educational discourse and not yet "normalized" in professional / policy discourse. If something is not recognized and is not familiar then it

is not discussed. Samir's reaction is more than a simple statement of omission; it suggests that SEN and teacher training as a subject is actively off the agenda.

8.1.6: Sticking with what you know

The discourses within which teacher trainers think sometimes display less interest in SEN – specifically in levels of inclusion – than in sticking to the familiar psychomedical model (see chapters 6.3.1 / 6.3.2) which dominates teacher training. This discourse is not one that is specifically and specially dominant in Oman, but exists globally even in those countries like the UK that pride themselves on SEN provision. Maher (interviewed 2003) is typical: names and concepts flow in a circularity which leaves conceptualization of policy, that real event that affects the habits and lives of specific sectors of people, almost untouched. It is almost as if the concepts were – for the respondents – occupying a completely different reality to the education policy they experience.

> Teachers should obtain knowledge especially about psychology and try to understand every stage of growth. That is clear – it is straightforward, we understand that. Everyone understands. (Basma, interviewed 2003)

This observation is all very well by itself; but as a guide to teacher training and SEN, it becomes potentially reductionist. SEN and teacher training are, in this paradigm, straightforward so that the teacher's individual efforts and general training will suffice in all contexts and with all children. Since Basma is a teacher trainer with some authority, this observation signals that what "everyone understands" – the concepts and practices with which they are familiar – is best.

Theoretical application that is grounded on familiar territory may reinforce itself by combining with the poor or uncertain connection between teaching staff, administration, local government and teacher trainers. Unfamiliar ideas in such circumstances threaten deterioration of such connections. This administrative bind, perhaps partly due to the dependent bead thread system of policy transmission – which disconnects the desire to make decisions at a micro level – reflects the lack of theory in particular and specifically a belief that SEN does not fit. In terms of teacher training and SEN the micro aspects of policy implementation and adaptation – responses to developing policies such as adaptations in the classroom, the school and the teacher training establishment – are crucial: experience of disablement and the needs of all students including an awareness of disablement as a factor in education is not something that can be undertaken at a higher level and transmitted down the policy thread effectively. Experience of real needs will always contradict the policy expectations of bureaucrats: such policy expectations therefore need to be open to change not blocked by the one-way nature of the dependent thread of policy-actor beads. Saif's "proper channels" are thus at odds with his explicit enthusiasm, reflecting the deference with which he treated the interviewer, while his enthusiasm and concern are contradicted by his deference to the better judgement of the Ministry with which he deals and to which he is subordinate. Struggle becomes a passing admission of bureaucratic inadequacy, a disjunction between concepts of teacher training and SEN and policy as it is understood and developed. Deference is one of the features maintaining the dependent bead thread system: it is a downward pressure which blocks

feedback from its source, and incidentally prevents policy initiatives. Saif's natural deference is at odds with his perception of policy failures.

> I cannot say that so far there is any urgent need [for SEN teacher training or SEN provision] we had a plan to establish a centre called the "Society Service Centre" [and] I attended meetings in the other GCC states and … we submitted a proposal. I have a copy if you like. … We submitted it to His Excellency the Minister of Higher Education through the proper channel, the Director General and so on, saying [this was] to establish a society service centre to serve the community in all fields … including special needs … but the Minister of Higher Education did not agree on that … there are no financial allocations, though such establishments are policy. … No, there is probably no urgent need. (Saif, interviewed 2003)

Saif's "cannot say" is, in the original Arabic, more like a preference *not* to say – an avoidance of criticism. (See chapter 3.2.4 for a commentary on some of the problems – and benefits – of translating from Arabic into English.) He expresses each part of the problem – the Ministry does not agree; there are no financial allocations; this contradicts explicit policy aims – but refuses to link these together into overt criticism. Finally his efforts are dismissed by himself, since there is "no urgent need" for SEN teacher training provision: the wisdom of authority prevails, and Saif is, in some sense, content with the *status quo* or must put up with it. Zaid is more forthright about the disjunction at the heart of Ministerial decision-making.

> We do this [submit reports and advice] continuously, all the time … we submitted a guidance programme at the request of the Ministry, we [had] worked for two years and kept the programme ready … and now it is which the management and we are waiting … there is concern but things need to be decided without the red tape. We are waiting. (Zaid, interviewed 2003)

"Red tape" is often – and certainly here – a euphemism for the bureaucratic struggle in all government policy systems between power and those resisting its particular application (or misapplication or non-application). Here an education policy advisory document has been researched and sent in, but the response is still awaited – clearly a point of some aggravation for Zaid, who does not even know what is happening. Instead of policy-making by consultation and professional input there is policy-making by hermetically sealed committees which then may be more prone to ignore any incoming advice. Again, this is probably the rule rather than the exception globally, since organizations such as bureaucracies are liable to be self-serving: the preference for assessing schools through testing expressed by the UK Department of Education is at odds with feedback from the teaching body – such feedback has taken a considerable time to make an impact. (In the West, policy-making is shaped to construct and mobilize legitimation: bureaucratic measures are one aspect of this process.) Bureaucratic struggle creates a kind of anti-policy - advocating research and educational suggestions which, then, are put clearly outside the respondent's remit.

8.2: Linkages and breaks in the dependent bead thread – poor upward linkages

Links between education policy-makers, policy-implementers and their objectives may be abstract (they may be following the directions of a five year plan) or concrete (a policy-maker involved, like Noora, interviewed 2001, at the micro-political level), formal or informal, visible or invisible. Obvious linkages lie between a senior committee at SQU's College of Education and senior members of the Department of Psychology – with substantial input into Oman's teacher training – and upwards to the Ministries of

Education, Higher Education and Social Development, and downwards to teacher trainers at SQU, teacher trainees and thus the school community. The uppermost linkage between senior academics and teacher trainers and Ministries – which might usefully be modelled in the dependent bead thread as a two-way arrow between the top two beads – will often take the form of formal advice, a committee report, backed by more abstract yet still visible linkages where individuals on the committee make *ad hoc* contact with senior members of the ministerial staff. Because this upward linkage does not have the *force of power* that the downward linkages express, it was not included in the model. This linkage may very occasionally be made in the form of feedback through questionnaires – but even these easily performed and basic linkages are avoided by those who deny the usefulness of opinion from lower down the policy thread.

> For the teacher trainees, I really have no detailed idea on how special education could be studied, because we are not teaching any such subjects … with regards to integration or segregation [of those with SEN] [teacher trainees] also have no idea about this and we don't ask them or put [the subject] into our questionnaires, so we really cannot make out their opinions. (Maher, interviewed 2003)

Maher's dismissal of the needs or opinions of others has already been noted (see chapter 7.2), but here what is suggested is that trainees' opinions on SEN are of no value or invisible because Maher is outside any SEN-related discourse. Simply because Maher combines integration with segregation does not balance his comment, since segregation is what currently exists. The useful upward link that might help adapt policy to needs as well as grant a fresh viewpoint is denied – and trainees themselves are aware of this denial (Al Belushi, 2003). Invisible linkages may occur when the reputation of a committee member (for example, Noora – see chapter 4.1) goes before them and prompts

or alters a senior actor's point of view. The weaknesses of the upward links exposed in the interviews may create some simplification of the difficulties facing the educational establishment.

> When a seminar is held, a lot of opportunities arise and many doors are opened and we are exposed to various types of expertise and there may be an exchange of knowledge and then the [SEN] problems can be redressed adequately with new ideas. (Ishaaq, interviewed 2003)

Problems are redressed – that is set straight not *addressed* – in this discourse: little need, therefore, for any detailed educational philosophy that may also include provision for SEN students. Seminars are enough to *redress* problems adequately – though quite how Ishaaq does not demonstrate. Disjunction is denied because adequate provision is made through "seminars" – a loose term which could denote almost any set of informal as well as formal activities. This use of the seminar, an informal meeting that occurs outside rather than within the policy-making structure, does not imply discursive openness. The important consideration in the identification and analysis of policy disjunction is to see where policy formulation takes place, and where the various actors are situated during the process. Do their positions change, or is it inevitable that bureaucracy – any and perhaps most types of bureaucracy - remains exclusive and petrifies the position of actors on the policy bead thread and thus of those appropriate or disrupted linkages?

> We want to introduce subjects which fit the community better, but the other thing is the practical side – the [teacher trainees] study one term which is not nearly enough to apply to school work, the conditions they face. There are too many things [they learn] which have nothing to do with the community, nothing to do with special needs … there is no real continuity. We always end up back in the same place. (Hamed, interviewed 2003)

Disjunction from real needs is partly the result of overall policy disjunction – there is no reason to believe that, with concepts and policies unconnected, what actors do meets the needs of their society. There is clearly a difficulty in defining "needs", but however these may be defined – for example on the Maslovian scale of needs (Maslow, 1970) or indeed a scale more accurately reflecting the range of SEN – there is no mechanism somehow guaranteeing a link between those needs and the actors – the Ministries – which are, nominally, designed to help meet those needs. Upward links are usually notable by their absence.

> We don't talk to [the Ministries] about this … [SEN] is never discussed at work … we don't talk about this at all, even in the meetings of our unit or in the meetings of the division. … I alert my students [myself]. (Samir, interviewed 2003)

One interesting difference between the UK and Oman, and one which may exacerbate the disjunction between those concepts in use and the policies as they affect the training of teachers and the provision of SEN, is the absence of a class often not well regarded in the UK – managers (Bines, 1995: 164). This class of bureaucrats has a role in constructing and fitting policy to both the practicalities of resources and thus, the fit between concepts and the realities of policy. Managers in the UK public sector are often popularly perceived to break the facilitating contacts between public service workers and their clients; the popular perception is that their presence is a drain on resources. However, their absence may be equally debilitating: without a trained group acting as policy intermediaries, the dependent policy thread becomes even more defined by the gaps between the individual beads and by the downward pressure of power relations. There is

a concomitant lack of intervention of professionalized workers – and a lack of professionalized discourse.

8.3: The nature of education policy

In order to understand the discrepancies of some aspects of SEN policy in Oman – a disjunction which is caused or exacerbated by the failed relation of policy makers to teacher trainers, teachers (Al Belushi, 2003) and students – it may be useful to re-examine the nature of education policy (Meadmore, 1995: 10). Policy is not simply a way of advancing the socio-political aims of an elite – though it is this – it is also a way of knowing the governed population: policy creates an intimate contact between governors and governed. The more this contact is adopting and adaptive – a dialogue of sorts – the fewer gaps between policy and implementation, the less the disjunction; that there is always some element of disjunction may be an inevitability of any government. If, as Al Belushi suggests (2003) education professionals are cynical, such cynicism is a "psychological defence of weakness to power" (Wallerstein, 2003: 166) and the result of the downward bead thread pressure.

Policy is about knowing and control: what is clear however is that knowing and control is paradoxically more problematic and less effective the more autocratic the education policy system becomes. This, in turn, generates contradictory discourses among respondents.

> The obstacles faced by teachers who engage in special education [probably] stem from an organizational reason … such obstacles may be due to ministerial organization, though only sometimes. There [may be] confusion. Financially the Sultanate has no problems and develops all people in all fields, it is a matter of time before these things are arranged and organized in ways similar to other countries. (Maher, interviewed 2003)

Apart from Maher's seeming to contradict himself – are there problems or not? – what is clear is that obstacles are created by the bureaucracy: if finances are not at issue then it is clear Maher is reflecting an understanding of education policy as deliberate obstacle. When he goes on to suggest future positive changes, this may be more in consideration of the interviewer's sensibilities than a reflection of his own ideas. What should be apparent here are the strategies of "governmentality" (Meadmore, 1995: 10) which aim at controlling the lives of those within the policy remit (teacher trainees; those students with SEN; parents of disabled children) adjusting them to "the state's best interests by using the most convenient means" (Meadmore, 1995: 10) – an aim which will be more pronounced in an (educational) autocracy. The most convenient means are usually those means tried previously – education policy liaisons which are developed along predictable routes. This is what creates disjunction as inappropriate, poor-fit policy laid over complex, poorly understood situations.

> How can teachers do their jobs within a curriculum which is congested, and designed only to achieve certain limited objectives within the education system. … We should understand that this education system is not just a group of educational goals, but it should be a complementing series of groups. There is a need to have [SEN] linked to social education, national education and physical education [but] … no one is interested. (Saif, interviewed 2003)

Here is cynicism as a response to powerlessness. The curriculum is symbolic of the lack of education policy – one that presents the need to understand the complete picture of a need for recognized complementary goals and input from interested groups, with SEN linked into the whole. Saif perceives that this holistic approach to create and nurture linkages is not being encouraged, and the lack of encouragement is because of a lack of interest. If linkages are discouraged or broken up, the natural result may be to discourage people from fostering existing links or establishing new ones.

8.4: Interpreting education policy

The ideas that determine education policy in Oman are dictated partly by experiences of policy-making and policy outcomes among the education policy elite within ministries. Often such experiences suggest that however positive professional (or other) responses may be, there is only one way for policy to inform the dominant educational discourses; alternatives can be ignored, or actively turned aside.

> I forgot the attempt [at SEN policy] in 1995, but the idea was thwarted … we made our contacts and hammered out a programme and we received good responses, and then [we were told] there was no need for special education. … Recently the [psychology] division felt blocked and frustrated. (Younnis, interviewed 2003)

Disjunction may be actively created and encouraged in order to stall policy input, or prevent interpretations which may run against the established direction of education policy; it is also possible that disjunction is the more comfortable option where the range of alternatives may seem expensive, threatening, alien or even incomprehensible. In Oman interpreting education policy is arguably and in certain situations a more perverse

process than experienced in the West – very little like that described by Bines (1993: 92) – since the lower dependent beads' experience on the policy thread is either negative or confused: the further down the policy thread the actor is, the more disconnected they are from education policy conceptualization. Interpretation thus becomes disconnected from both the original aims as well as the tangible results of policy, and floats free as individual reactions, not necessarily to a specific educational policy but perhaps to social and political limitations. Education policy is not made and remade; it is instead disconnected from the usual political re-interpretive process – a process which, elsewhere in the Oman policy arena, may be more dynamic and involving. Lack of feedback is a situation in which interpretation is increasingly fragmented the further education policy travels down the policy thread. It may also be that middle and upper levels of the education policy thread are equally transformed by their experiences of disconnection – perhaps making choices more limited and less open to new ideas.

Bowe et al (1992) describe the conversational process of policy abounding in contradictions and ambiguities, natural caesurae which create new aspects to policy. These are generative ambiguities, and contradictions which can either be bridged or absorbed into better policy. Feedback and active reinterpretation allows this remaking. Within the field of education, Oman does not yet have a system as practiced or organic as this and thus education policy, once lost in holes, is assumed rather than reinterpreted. Bowe et al (1992) also show how reliant effective policy-making is on systems of generative ambiguity and localized reinterpretation. But a top-down, hierarchical system

not only short-circuits this generative quality, it also makes overall implementation itself much less effective.

> You are talking about the official level and private initiatives … ? For the private initiatives, yes, I can say the Omani community is a sympathetic community [towards disability] there are teachers and parents who can embrace [those with SEN] and help them overcome a lot of things in their lives. At the official level, in policy, so far there is nothing, no ideas … no facilities in schools or anywhere to address [SEN], and no ideas officially. (Saif, interviewed 2003)

Saif suggests there may be a pool of unofficial ideas, existing and fostered by a sympathetic community of teachers and parents. This community, instead of actively interpreting and negotiating education policy, exists in the limbo of unofficial policy generation, forced to cope with provision at an immediate level. This unsupported community functions disconnected from the policy bead thread – there are "no ideas officially", an indictment of the work of the Department of SEN at the Ministry of Education – and the special schools similarly work somehow to develop by their presence an awareness of SEN. Such low level radiation of sympathy allows an immediate generation or interpretation of policy but unconnected to governmental education policy aims and therefore vulnerable if these suddenly shift unfavourably.

8.5: The technologies of government

Where, then, does education policy fit within these unique technologies (see chapter 7.5; Foucault, 1991) of Omani government? Whereas many governments may deploy various technologies of educational management – testing, assessment, IST, teacher training, parent-teacher organizations, policy committees, independent reports and so on – in

Oman the technology itself deploys the system of education as a linear and un-adaptive and therefore relatively un-adaptable process, where lateral input is not encouraged. This is what creates the gaps in the mechanism observed by Al Belushi (2003). In terms of teacher training and SEN the aims of policy become concentrated in treatment (see chapter 6.2.2) and control. Key here are the concepts of responsibility and accountability. The technology of governance, those things which allow more effective recognition of whom and how to govern, and why, is balanced by the responsibilities of those making education policy – in terms of their association, publicly, with specific policy – and thus their accountability. In Oman's dependent education policy bead thread system neither responsibility nor accountability plays an active or overt part in education policy-making. The absence of this allows the beads to spread out, distances to develop, and disjunction to become the norm rather than the exception to be dealt with by policy reform or adaptation.

One of the reasons why disjunction between widely-recognized and understood concepts and actual policy is characteristic of the system is not the lack of available skills (Bines, 1993: 92) but rather the autocratic (education) technologies of the state that keep available skills from being well used. Omani schools certainly lack adequate management (Al Belushi, 2003) and this gap affects policy implementation, interpretation and its configuration by education policy-makers at all levels, but what is also clear is that teacher education is undermined by its own lack of relative autonomy.

> [A] school management could change a lot of things regards handling the disabled, both the physically and mentally [disabled] or those with general learning

> difficulties, there should be a [management] policy, the teacher should have a proper mandate, not have trainers or other teachers acting as managers and administrators. (Riad, interviewed 2003)

Riad sees adequate management as integral to the proper and effective pursuit of education policy, since effective management could have the result of freeing up both trainers and teachers for their "proper mandates". While a worry in the UK (Bines, 1993) is that greater participation in policy-making and consultation in implementation may lead to policy fatigue, in Oman and those states where consultation and involvement and adequate (or any) education policy management do not exist, or exist only briefly and in an *ad hoc* manner, it is not fatigue with the process as it impinges on working life, but a sense of dislocation from any education policy-making.

The lack of significant education policy is a direct result of the stifling or discouragement of, or merely the concomitant absence of initiative from those within the Omani education system. What can be called a policy initiative in the Western context would be a misnomer in the Omani context. Lack of initiative, or the lack of ability at many key educational policy levels to think out new interpretations of policy as it relates to educational provision, are important reasons for disjunction.

8.6: Conclusion

A crucial aspect of the type of disjunction visible in the Omani system is that the tensions and restraints documented and understood in Western contexts do not exist, and policy implementation (Jones, 1983: 241) does not occur according to the Western model. But

the Western model – for good or ill – has some effect on what the Omani government devises for use. This could be one reason, as the research data suggests, that there is little meaningful interconnection between different parts of the education policy apparatus in terms of teacher training and SEN.

However, what should be born in mind from this chapter is the need to re-theorize the construct of policy "struggle" in a developing state with autocratic education policy-making. There have undoubtedly been theoretical dilemmas in the struggle of this research to impose Western education policy analysis in the Omani setting. In societies where power may be relocated to overcome political disempowerment – women developing a domestic model of influence for the workplace could be one example – it may not be useful always to describe policy struggles according to the Western perception of political groupings, lobbies and other associations. The dependent bead thread analogy stresses the disconnectedness of policy implementation, but may not always be subtle enough or generative enough as a model to uncover the ways human beings struggle – often ingeniously – to overcome the disjunctions described here.

Disjunction between ideas and policy is bound to occur when education policy, the act or attitude communicated down the dependent thread of beads, is imposed rather than generated, and cannot be adequately adumbrated at the various levels. Nor is there to be found, as might be expected, the lubrication that management could provide. The distance between those who determine education policy and those charged with its

implementation, or those directly affected by it, may frequently be so great that the machine of education policy is threatened with disconnection from its *raison d'etre.*

In examining the disjunction between those concepts articulated by the teacher trainers interviewed and the policy regarding SEN as it exists, it is well to remember that this situation is not simply a disjunction between putative aims and the opinions of a group of education professionals/teacher trainers. While government policy in Western systems does not necessarily determine change – "[t]he evidence suggests that educational aims and educational reform are a matter for educators and are not achievable via the kind of decisions made at government level" (Fulcher, 1999: 256) – in Oman the disjunctions that disconnect education policy from implementation and policy-makers from teacher trainers and teachers may only currently be obviated by decisions made at government level. Any small pools of community-based policy adjustment are unlikely to affect teacher training at any depth. The dependent policy bead threads as disjunctive systems may be changed but only systemically – that is politically – not incrementally.

There is always a disparity between professional political/bureaucratic discourses – a government or governing elite – and those professional discourses expressed in and which express educators. This has not been explored here because none of the main tranche of respondents came from the political elite, and any responses coded that showed criticism or made comment on that elite were implicit and too few to sustain an examination of the disparity. Nevertheless change is sustained by the activities of people such as those interviewed: government policy in Oman initiates, but these middle ranking

teacher trainers recognize and facilitate and channel policy. Oman is unfortunate in facing the dual disadvantage of government education policy-making that has yet to build upon significant experiences of success or failure: it is weak because the educational discourse may often be derivative and unconsidered.

> If we want to have an inclusion programme, a real programme, it should be based on scientific ideas, and a joint effort of both civil and state-owned organizations. No one knows [what is happening]. What is happening now is [a series of] individual initiatives, it is not even a community approach. (Yazeed, interviewed 2003)

Together these factors – educational discourse that is weak or inappropriate – suggest that disjunction can often result in policy and provision paralysis; not totally or uniformly, but occurring at various moments and affecting the various beads near the end of the policy thread. While there is no "reflexivity" or "critical distance" among the policy-making hierarchy (Ball, 1997: 269) there is equally a poverty of awareness – a lack of interested commitment – among those directly or indirectly involved in teacher training and SEN provision: "no one knows [what is happening]". This may be offset by the concern and commitment of a set of particularly valuable individuals (Noora, interviewed 2001, notably, and also others) but as the UK's National Health Service has learned, reliance on individual commitment rather than adequate institutional policies is not a good recipe. It puts pressure on certain willing and able individuals to make up for the inadequacies in the system but changes little, and, in fact, may even make things worse systemically.

One of the reasons there are so many contrasting constructions of disability, and specifically of SEN in the interviews, is because policy defines what is and what is not

SEN (Hahn, 1985: 294), and Oman's education policy deficit lies at the core of the disjunction between concepts – distinct but not built in to provision – and policy – vague and unformed (Oliver, 1990). There is no "material force of ideas" (Gramsci, 1971) but rather a heterogeneity of disconnections, none of which are in any case disconnections between effective areas of provision. What helps effectiveness is feedback, interconnection, discussion and understanding specific to the unique conditions that present. Without these facilitating factors there may be fewer strong oases of SEN provision and less chance of adequate country-wide policy.

Disjunction creates dependency; the system of beads sustains a culture already entrenched by the rentier mentality of an oil economy: "Dependency is … reinforced … through the manner in which the discourse with regard to disability and social policy is conducted" (Oliver, 1990: 88). Policy will, in this situation, usually resolve itself into a compromise between different discourses and between concepts – developed in training, and strong enough to be sustainable through many hard and unsupported years in a classroom – and those practices developed by trainers and teachers in response to poor environment, no management, lack of skills, lack of motivation, lack of support or IST, and no particular sense of personal professionalism (Williams, 1962: 172). The resulting muddle may be resolved by the struggle between groups and between policy-makers and teachers, but the muddle is the result of values partially interpreted but improperly negotiated between groups (Ball, 1990: 3). In the meantime those losing out because of education policy disjunction are school students and, specifically, those with SEN.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

This chapter draws together the ideas and findings of the thesis, looking again at the research questions, and offering responses to them. It revisits the key hypothesis of the dependent bead thread, a heuristic device which models the formation of education policy in Oman, tells the story of the research and suggests some practical use for this study.

The conclusions are by no means negative; there is a considerable group of energetic and perceptive people at all levels of Omani education, and although this research has demonstrated some negative aspects of education bureaucracy there are many reasons to be optimistic. There are professionals committed to an improvement in the lives of some of the most disadvantaged students; discourses are changing and becoming more inclusive and the authority of the psychomedical paradigm, dominant for so long, will weaken.

In the UK 1981 Education Act, informed by Warnock (1978), the central role of mainstream schools in meeting SEN was highlighted, giving guidance for the identification and assessment of SEN. It also put parents back in leading roles for any crucial decisions involving a young person. While this research does not seek to try to imitate the far reaching role of Warnock, any research helps raise the profile of debate. Empowering and positive changes may well be due to slow incremental effects, and research such as this is only one factor in such change. In Oman, where education may seem a strange and unknowable procedure to many parents, where in 2005 the adult

illiteracy rate is still somewhere near 40% (Ministry of Social Development, 2005), any contributions to debate must be positive, as must be any movement of social and educational discourse away from the usual channels.

9.1: The research story

The most important consideration behind choosing and then developing this research was to generate data which might help build understanding of the challenges facing SEN provision in Oman; data on a subject that, hitherto, has not been well researched, and about which many people at all levels in education in Oman remain less well informed.

The end result of the research must be use, rather than ornament: this thesis should not be research for its own sake, but express a clear practical purpose, illustrating the need to extend teacher training in those areas linked to SEN. Oman's development has been swift, and over a short period; that there are some shortcomings in training and pedagogy is understandable.

The usefulness of this research lies in its offering an Omani take on Omani education, rather than relying on Western-orientated research and methodology; with interviews as the main research tool, this research should offer more than simply trying to tack a Western approach on to Oman's unique situation. Any observations are aimed primarily at Omanis, though these should also be of interest to a wider audience in developing countries. It is clear even from this limited research that some Omanis and some of those expatriates within the Omani education system have a negative picture of disability, and

that some Omani social discourses delineate what is considered normal. This cannot be useful in education, but it is an almost universal background noise to provision.

This research could have offered analysis concentrating on other groups beyond teacher trainers: teachers themselves and, perhaps most significantly, those whose voices are least often heard in any society, those with SEN themselves, unmediated by carers, teachers or other professionals. This would be a way of shifting away from the dominant professionally-driven paradigms currently evident in Oman, and exploring unknown territory. A true "discourse on disability" (Fulcher, 1999: 25) cannot be inclusive if it merely reflects the ideas of one group which itself defines "those with SEN". If the dependent bead thread analogy teaches anything it is that further research needs to break away from hierarchical and social constraints.

As has already been observed (see chapter 3.5) the processes of research from design to writing up cannot be neutral, and what are laid painfully bare in these processes are not only the biases of design but also the personal biases of the researcher. There is therefore an inevitable struggle, and bearing this thought in mind the research experience was an intensive one – and not one ended with the submission of the finished thesis. The initial idea was to obtain as wide a swathe of information as possible from the narrow and relatively closed realm of SEN provision in Oman. To this end the targets of education bureaucrats and teacher trainers were logical since there are few SEN-dedicated professionals in teacher training.

The research design (see chapter 3.1) was one that developed organically to cope with the paucity of sources through intensive coding and analysis. It was assumed, initially, that the coding process would expose certain patterns, and that the best way to see more would be to allow the coding to generate as much information as possible (see chapter 3.3). It was also assumed that there would be crucial comparative linguistic data generated. The first assumption proved correct – especially when a light was thrown back on the results of coding by further consideration of the arenas of policy and power – the second assumption proved incorrect inasmuch as the direction of the thesis was away from the mechanics of the linguistic towards the dynamics of the philosophical in order better to answer the research questions. This journey was not an easy one, and usefully kept in mind a holistic attitude to research.

> The point is *how* you arrive, by what dangers, mistakes, fortuitous encounters, sleeps or slips of mind, by what insights achieved through great expense of time and passion and to what hard-won formulations … . [T]o avoid making mere thematic or arbitrary connections, and yet to begin to weave ample fabrics from a single loom. (Lowry, 1980: 318)

Although Lowry is speaking specifically of the unique research journey Eric Auerbach takes in *Mimesis* (2003: first published 1947) the observation is pertinent. The initial pilot, the first interviews, the observations and questionnaires at the three special schools and, finally, the core interviews which developed into the analysis chapters 6, 7 and 8, were filled with "fortuitous encounters" with people and ideas; there were also "sleeps and slips of the mind" which demanded rigorous use of the literature and re-examination of the coding and of the original research questions. Those interviews that were initially illuminating or disappointing often reversed their adjectives as the coding and analysis

took place: what had looked unpromising sometimes proved to be the most generative. Some interviews delivered what the researcher had not expected – for example, the dependent policy bead thread. Thus the "sleeps and slips" were vital because they pointed up initial simplifications or distortions.

The caveats already mentioned – that those with SENs have little or no direct voice in this thesis and that, ideally, there would have been more Omani interviewees – have not necessarily reduced the richness of the data nor the validity of the research conclusions. But one lesson is clear: that if the dependent policy bead thread is an adequate demonstration of poor communication creating disjunctions, then the idea of "voice" is an important one.

> [T]he notion of 'voice' is problematic. Our underlying concern is with power and politics in education, yet the ability to scrutinize, to gaze on another, is itself premised on power … and it is the researcher's voice that is dominant. … There is … the problem that some voices might be heard in ways that assert their authority and interests over those who cannot easily access a position to be heard … [a voice] deemed to be outside the range that is considered to be authentic or valid. … In addition, a research text might silence a voice. (Ballard, 1999: 5)

Although Ballard is worried principally here about the greater "authenticity" of some SENs which displaces the validity of others, his observation is important to any research on socially excluded groups. Those SEN teachers and disabled students in Oman who have little or no voice may not, by this research, have been empowered to speak. Their silence continues despite the researcher's concerns. The researcher reviewed and coded and wrote up with an increasing sense of shock: that here were a set of educators who could at one in the same time be interested in pedagogy and the concept of SEN provision

yet also be dismissive of those without a voice because of their difference. The shock of witnessing educators dumping disabled children – however abstractly – into "dustbins for disavowal" (Shakespeare, 1994) has amply illustrated the difficulty of the task ahead in terms of Omani SEN provision. What has been learnt painfully, in the process of this research, is that disavowal need not be active and apparent to be damaging; it can be passive and hidden in those discourses of "concerned professionals".

Initially it may well have been a set of certainties about SEN provision in Oman – that it was inadequate, but that this was due mainly to a poverty in education at all levels which might easily be remedied – that initiated the researcher's investigative journey. There was, therefore, a certain naiveté evident in a belief that provision was simply a question of tinkering with IST or TTC courses, perhaps at most of a review of current Omani legislation better to increase awareness and educational provision. However, as the stages of research developed and passed one into another, it became clear that there exists a considerable discursive complexity in Oman, and that, further, the education policy-making structures drive personal discourses into intellectual *cul-de-sacs*.

9.2: Key model of Omani SEN policy-making

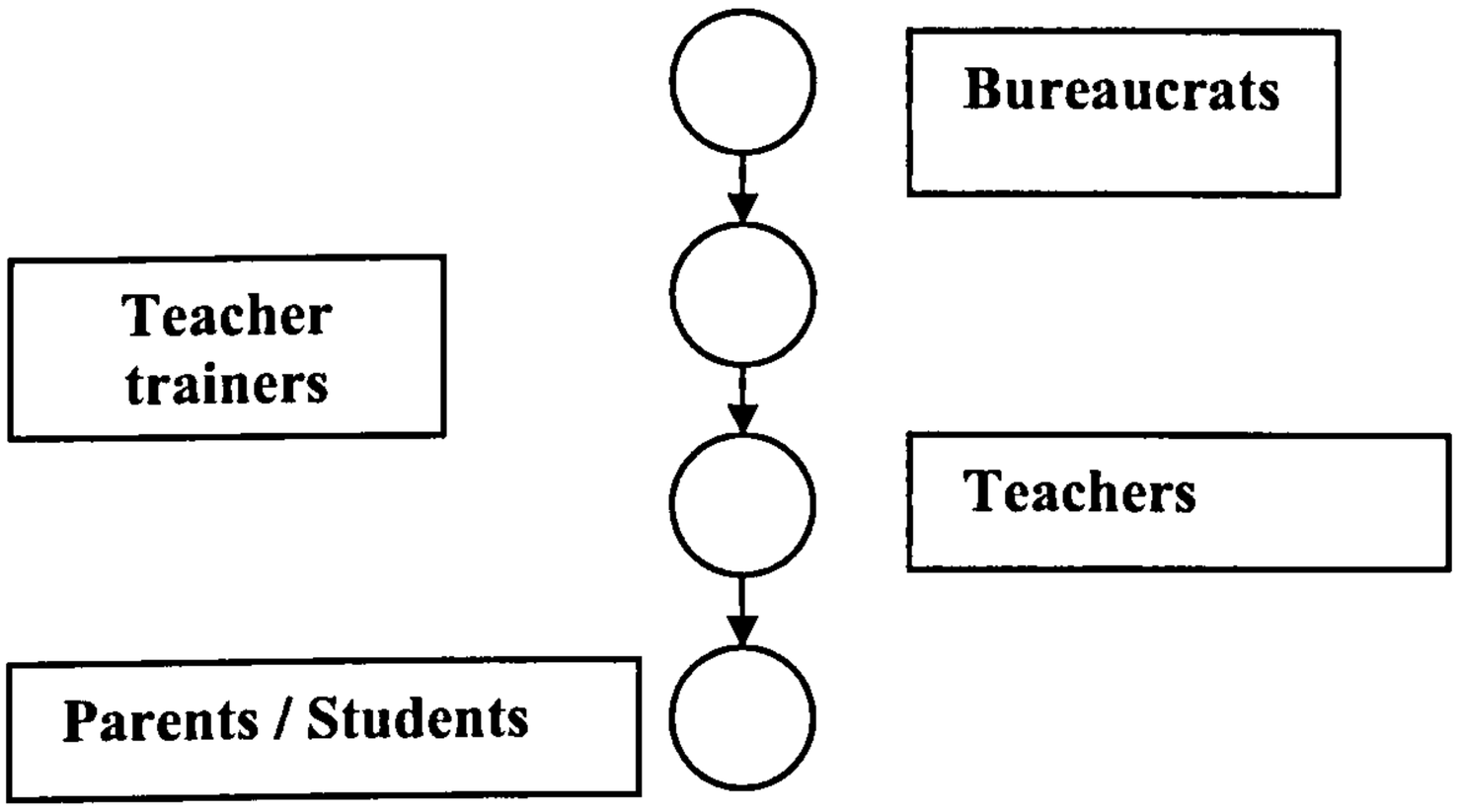
Oman is still a traditional society when it comes to thinking about difference and specifically about SEN: there is predominantly a traditional medicalized perspective held by those educationalists, policy makers and teacher trainers interviewed about what SENs are or what they require; the understanding of ordinary teachers or parents was not examined, but this paradigmatic narrowness may be true as much of those at the top of

the education hierarchy as those at the bottom. However, this assumption may obscure a more complex picture. There is an increasing number of people recognized as having SEN, and thus an increasing number who would – if appropriate identification were available universally – be designated as SEN students, and a larger number still with experience by some kind and level of contact. This increase in disablement may be due to intermarriage, the increasing number of accidents to which any developing society is prone, a higher than average level of anaemia and diabetes, sickle cell, and malnutrition. In the past, children with severe cases of disability died young; but now, with better medical care, many more live longer and enter the educational system.

The key task of any conclusion to a PhD is to offer a synthesis of the research and to consider whether the research questions have been explored. In this case, it is necessary now to ask whether the exploration offers an insight into the attitudes of education bureaucrats and teacher trainers in Oman, and if a shape can be discerned to the prevailing educational discourse of SEN and related pedagogy.

What has emerged from the analysis chapters has been a very clear model of the way Omani education policy is generated. From this has been produced a heuristic device – the dependent bead thread analogy (see chapter 7.5.1) – through which to explore the disjunction of individual actors within the education system, the power relationships which bear down on the lower beads in the thread and the unidirectional flow of policy-making.

Figure 9. 1: Dependent bead thread: from bureaucrats, through teacher trainers to teachers, parents and students



The thesis focuses on a moment in time in the development of Omani SEN policy-making, when this particular system pertains; it does not suggest that the dependent beads are set for all time, but argues that this current state is one that may affect future developments of education policy-making structures and decisions reached within them. Those interviewed for this research, mainly teacher trainers but also some senior bureaucrats and those involved with SEN in Oman, articulate their positions from within a system that is slowly changing and which will undergo further and wider changes. The nature of those changes, and the pressures and resistances they will encounter, can be gauged in the analysis of the interview data in the core research chapters.

9.3: Significance of results

The significance of the findings of the research chapters is based on an understanding that the paradigm observed, sampled and analyzed is a phenomenon with creative potential in the sense that a study of SEN provision through the eyes of teachers, teacher trainers,

civil servants and academics in Oman in 2003 may help suggest conceptual parallels elsewhere in the developing world.

Key themes have emerged from the coding and analysis. First, that although there is a variety of ideologies among the respondents, that variety is not great; the underlying homogeneity is particularly pointed up when a small number of individuals express attitudes that are unusual. Noora (interviewed 2001) in the initial analysis of chapter 4 and Shaima (interviewed 2003) in the main group stand out in their critical attitudes to the dominant practices regarding SEN and teacher training. There may be reasons for the homogeneity that exists generally other than simple ideological similarity: there might be an unwillingness to express dissenting or different opinion (chapter 3.4.2). There did not seem, however, to be an unwillingness to communicate amongst most respondents, and it is likely, had there been more widespread dissent, that this would have been visible through analysis of implicit opinion. There was much that was half-said or obscured by jargon, but little of this suggested a radical pedagogical or bureaucratic sub-culture.

Secondly, the level of awareness of SEN – even of current government-sponsored strategies such as the Integration Workshop or Pilot Project – amongst teacher trainers and the relevant civil servants seems low when set alongside the context of EU or Australian awareness. Terminology was used, or rather misused, to deflect the researcher's questioning. This level of awareness, which when challenged may have led to a marking out of territory as relevant, was further reflected in both a general lack of

conviction, disinterestedness and a paradoxical sense of wilful disconnection with the education policy-making system.

Thirdly there are, at the heart of the Omani educational discourses, breaks between those concepts which are understood and the policy-makers who refer to those concepts, and the policies themselves. Instead of a web of intercommunicating groups, interest groups, pressure groups, professional groups and policy-makers, there is only the dependent bead thread of top-down hierarchical education management – a system which encourages disjunction (chapter 7.5.1). This dependent bead thread system will ensure for the short to medium term that SEN / teacher training policy is maintained in the same *ad hoc* manner as in the past: change is not easy because the thread itself is a closed system interested only in delivering power rather than adapting concepts. What the dependent bead thread analogy illustrates is a system of power, which requires no endorsement from dependent beads: the whole relationship is one of dependency, dictated by bureaucratic exigencies. Despite this, systems are always dynamic and dependency of this depth generates asymptotes, which then flip a system from one equilibrium towards another (Wallerstein, 2003: 58-61). Nevertheless, for 2005 the dependent bead thread analogy works well to describe the Omani education system, illustrating the bureaucratic exigencies which determine teacher training and the provision of SEN.

> Legally, government by bureaucracy is government by decree, and this means that power … becomes the direct source of all legislation. Decrees … seem to flow from some over-all ruling power that needs no justification. … The bureaucrat, who by merely administering decrees has the illusion of constant action, feels tremendously superior to [those] "impractical" people who are forever entangled in "legal

> niceties" and therefore stay outside the sphere of power which to him is the source of everything. (Arendt, 1994: 123-124)

Although some Omani education bureaucrats' experiences outside the system suggest a range of alternative ways of seeing the world and conducting business, the system remains one of a determination of power by decree; the lowest beads on the dependent thread feel only the results of power and their own, inimical powerlessness.

> In governments by bureaucracy decrees appear in their naked purity as though they were no longer issued by powerful men, but were the incarnation of power itself and the administrator only its accidental agent. (Arendt, 1994: 124)

In other words, power affects all the beads on the dependent thread, turning each lower bead into the object of a vague bureaucratic exigency. The most noticeable, if often implicit aspect of the interviews was that whatever ideas individual bureaucrats might have, whatever concepts they may be faced with, these were irrelevant. Education policy in Oman – power by decree – creates a system where each dependent bead becomes isolated and "accidental": there is no organic, policy-making whole, and the beads hang in space held together only by the flow of power. This is not the ideal system for adaptation and change; it is not a system which listens; but it is a system which, in the isolation of individual beads, stores up considerable frustration. Teacher training should not be about passing on determined truths, but, rather, should be a complexity of interaction, reaction and adaptation to a range of new concepts – in the case of SEN a large range of concepts which spill over from the domain of disability into the identity of society and social function itself.

9.4: The research questions

9.4.1: Question 1

Is there an identifiable set of ideas and practices currently operational among teacher trainers in Oman, and more widely in the pedagogic environment, with regards to SEN? What are the concepts held most widely?

It should not be expected that such a diverse group of people as those employed in the Omani education system – professionals from throughout the Arab world – would share a single or even a similar set of ideas regarding how SEN could be prepared for in teacher training. In the data set, a variety of approaches emerged ranging from the holistic through to the dismissive: Noora (interviewed 2001) as well as Shaima and Dunya (interviewed 2003) share a conceptual framework which is inclusive – where disablement is not seen as a "problem", and where the psychomedical paradigm is hardly evident.

Others, such as Maher and Riad (interviewed 2003) demonstrated a strong and widely held belief in Oman that education – to extend the analogy from Rabelais (1982) – is about the shape of containers into which teachers pour their pedagogic effort; if the shapes are not "normal" or convenient then the effort should be suspended. The most widely held concept that emerged from data analysis was that teacher training and teaching are normative efforts designed to fill the right shape of containers with the available curricular material. Rabelais' ideal pedagogy that lights fires in students' minds may be rare in Oman given Al Belushi's (2003) analysis of trainee teacher and teacher motivations as non-vocational, based only on the extrinsic rewards of single-sex environments, money, better hours and early retirement.

9.4.2: Question 2

Is it possible to identify a particularity in the process of education policy-making in Oman which may, possibly, be applied to other developing states?

The single clearest finding of the research was the characterization of the Omani education policy process in terms of the dependent bead thread analogy in chapter 7.5.1. Policy-making may ideally be modelled as the end result of a consultative process that is more like a three-dimensional web of interconnections allowing feedback from all levels and thus distributing power throughout a system (Guérin, 1982). In Oman, education policy-making operates two-dimensionally, as a top-down process. Ideas are generated by the senior members of the bureaucracy and then communicated downwards. There is little meaningful feedback. Those beads nearest the bottom of the thread will feel the pressure of policy and the effect of power and this in turn may render them pedagogically conservative, less open to change and less interested in new concepts such as those from within inclusive SEN discourses. The policy bead thread analogy reflects a closed system of relationships between teacher trainers and bureaucrats and between teacher trainers, their trainees and their pupils.

9.4.3: Question 3

If there are disjunctions between concepts expressed and policies made in teacher training and SEN, what might these be?

In a closed system of education policy-making and implementation there are few ways to adapt policy to fit needs that are not already part of the policy agenda: instead, ideas and perceptions and experiences are stuck within the individual beads of the dependent bead

thread. The research did identify some significant disjunctions between theoretical and policy work, and between policy and implementation (see chapters 8.1.5 and 8.2) – at different levels within the bead thread – which means that the needs of teachers and those with SEN might not be met adequately (Zaid, interviewed 2003). Policy-making and implementation were found to be dislocated, a situation exacerbated by the disconnection of teacher trainers from their bureaucracies and a reduced level of communication between them and other professionals (Al Belushi, 2003). This reduced communication creates a situation where some are well informed (Noora, interviewed 2001, and Dunya, interviewed 2003, most notably), while others (Maher and Riad, interviewed 2003) are less well informed or do not wish to become better informed. These disjunctions represent systemic inadequacies.

9.4.4: Question 4

Do the experiences of SEN and teacher training articulated in the global literature have relevance to the unique conditions in Oman?

Although the literature examined in chapter 2 offers a considerable corpus regarding SEN, and teacher training and SEN, every society offers unique variants. In Oman these variants are partly generated by the short period of modern development (see chapter 1) as well as the particular way educational provision has been developed and adapted.

There are certainly limits to the applicability of the westernized literature in terms of teacher recruitment and training (Al Belushi, 2003). Perhaps in the longer term there will be a growing number of teachers and teacher trainers in Oman for whom the global literature may offer an additional, parallel resource rather than a negative or alien

challenge to be resisted or ignored. In terms of this research, the literature offers a starting point in indicating the *shape* of SEN discourse rather than any clear road map indicating its *direction*. The unique Omani educational provision is constructed through and by pedagogic certainties, rather than generative pedagogic doubts. So while the global literature does have relevance to Oman, Oman may not yet be willing to accept doubt and uncertainty as the price of and engine for change.

The research questions helped in the exploration of mixed and sometimes contradictory discourses dominant among those involved in teacher training and SEN. These contradictions are further expressed in the distance between discursive concepts and real policies. The research questions identify a peculiarity of education policy process in top-down bureaucratic systems, and suggest that those conditions unique to Oman should not block the experiences described here from a more universal application. There may be more and deeper similarities than there are substantial differences.

9.5: The uses of the research

The uses of this research will depend on the amount of light shed on a specific and little researched aspect of Omani education – the provision of SEN and the preparation of teacher training pedagogies for such provision. This research could be a valuable template for future efforts, while also affecting, in some degree, the ways SEN enters the minds of education policy-makers in Oman, and the space SEN occupies once there. It may also help to support those working with SEN as a guide, making student teachers,

parents, teachers, students and others feel less alone and offering a sense of community – a community which is not always apparent in SEN provision in Oman (see chapter 5.8).

This research suggests the need for some better understanding of educational provision within the context of nations which, like Oman, have a short history of organized state education. A general theory of such provision can never be – and ought never to seek to be – exhaustive, partly because of the huge variability between states socially, politically and economically, and partly because pedagogic theory cannot both be definitive *and* generative. There are strong ideas about the wider applicability of SEN theory (Ball, 1990b; Fulcher, 1999; Armstrong [et al], 2000; DeValenzuela [et al], 2000) which fit it within educational systems less in terms of the specifics of pedagogic practice than of more abstract rights discourses. If those with SEN in Oman are to be well served it may be because better science replaces prejudice (Bailey, 1998) and the poor fit of policy-making systems is more widely acknowledged.

It is possible that the lexicons of disability referred to by the majority of the respondents were sensitive to the context of disablement partly created by the research itself – in other words, the respondents took their cues too often from the researcher's own terminology and the ideas this represented – and it is logical to surmise that therefore these lexicons are in a state of flux. In some cases respondents' terminologies suggest an anticipation of change, in almost all cases they suggest a level of uncertainty. While awareness and provision of SEN within Oman are both still at a very early stage, the researcher's initial assumptions were not always met: sometimes assumptions were too conservative – often

respondents were remarkably astute and sensitive; sometimes assumptions were too optimistic – a significant proportion of respondents were already imbued with those concepts of normality, gender, difference and acceptability representing wider, traditionally dominant social discourses. One contribution of this research may therefore be to display the variation which exists in Omani perceptions of disability, suggesting a greater complexity and subtlety than hitherto appreciated.

The analysis of respondents' views on SEN reveals there is no simple relationship with a dominant social or indeed with the dominant religious discourse. It is possible – indeed very likely – that the perception of disability, and the specific ways SEN is linked to educational provision, has no direct link to any overt belief systems or social practices, but, rather, is the result of the interaction of more neutrally conceived factors: resources; personal experience; the perceptions of others; curricular demands; the resources of imagination.

Process is not always or just progress – although there have been considerable changes within Oman, and these are continuing. The developmental stage hypothesis (Brouillette 1993) suggests there may be a point when social, political, economic and educational factors aggregate to promote "take off" in education provision (see chapter 2.4). But changes should not automatically be equated positively with better provision for all – some processes may be, in the medium term, more exclusive, and introduce more barriers. This is not necessarily a wilfully negative or conservative reaction to the challenge of the new, but may be part of the ideological and contextual accommodation

many have to make, doing so with considerable difficulty. The contribution of this research may partly lie in mapping this process, and allowing others to make their own journeys towards progress. It may also help obviate the cynicism observed by Al Belushi (2003), present among some of the respondents (typically Saif, interviewed 2003) as an expression of their powerlessness.

9.6: The future of provision

Although Omani society may not be fully adapted to understand SEN as currently constructed in the West, the government is aware of the needs of easily and traditionally (psychomedicalized) identifiable groups such as the blind, mentally disabled, deaf and those with paraplegia, and is developing policy to accommodate them (Ministry of Social Development, 2004). Partly this awareness has been encouraged by better provision for such groups in other Gulf States. The single most important issue that has influenced the provision of SEN has been quite simply the enormous population growth.

Involving parents could have positive effects – the lack of parental communication with, and understanding of the education process is remarked on by respondents in chapter 5. A great deal of the 1981 Act still underpins SEN legislation in the UK: in that sense it had a clarifying as well as ground-breaking role. If a lesson has to be learnt for Oman it is that such initial legislation should be as clear and unambiguous as possible.

Any nation hoping to increase satisfactory provision of SEN would need to recognize the shortcomings of its own position. Oman may need to consider that some western modes

of SEN provision – reports, legislation and extensive new provision – are not necessarily the only or the right model to use. Inexpensive or traditionally based alternatives to western practice may be more appropriate.

In the UK five key factors have influenced the provision of SEN: **positive social attitudes** towards disabilities; **political will** (through legislation, and also through the activism and parent and other pressure groups mentioned earlier); **curricula development** to meet SEN in the ordinary classrooms; **awareness** of the need to train teachers to be able to deal with SEN in the classrooms and several **government documents and Acts of Parliament** which have directly influenced the current work with children (Stakes and Hornby, 2000). In Oman these factors may not pertain, or if they do, not in the same ways as in the UK. The most obvious cases would be the difference in political systems, and the different attitudes of Omanis to governance and policy.

In the UK, the establishment of a National Curriculum stated that all children attending school have a right to a "broad and balanced" programme (Stakes and Hornby, 2000) and that those with SEN should be allowed to follow the curriculum as much as possible. Although similar legislation exists in Oman, in some cases, budgetary requirements may mean that SENs are shunted aside as being of less importance – an attitude visible in both the initial and core interviews. Hadidi (1998) is critical of Omani practices of dismissing some SENs, creating a pool of the "ineducable", or of sending SEN students on

residential courses out of the country, but this criticism is now less pertinent as Oman learns from other Arab states and starts to instigate its own research and development.

An important government policy document for UK schools has been the code of practice (DfE, 2004: 4a), described as a "guide for schools and LEAs about the practical help they can give to pupils with special educational needs" (Stakes and Hornby, 2000: 5). It provides schools with valuable guidelines on how to organize provision and deliver curriculum for SEN children. Whether such guidelines would be of much practical use in a society already heavily bureaucratized such as Oman is an open question. Models adapted to local needs may be the key in Oman, rather than a forced modelling on alien practices. Importantly in those developing countries whose rural populations cannot be easily reached by education, questions need to be asked, such as are these models cheap, locally met and sensitive to context? Are they easily sustainable in terms of training; can they be linked to existing institutions – a local religious or community centre – and, most importantly for countries without deep educational infrastructures or long histories of education provision, what could be gained from portage models involving parents and other key adults?

9.7: The borders of comparison

This research – although focused on a unique social environment – should and could not be limited to Omani terms of reference only. The broader context impinges by dint of the foreign models of education used in Oman, the expatriate staff dominating the education environment, current Omani post-graduate research being carried on elsewhere, and the

lack of depth in Omani education conceptualization which automatically sucks in elements from wider global education discourses. The broader context also impinges because this research was done from within a European academic institution. The borders of comparison that contextualize the research also define those struggles of ideas and perceptions it contains. "Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. [A] struggle ... about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings" (Said, 1993: 6). Although Said is specifically considering the interlinked phenomena of culture and imperialism, this aptly translates into the struggle between different perspectives of global education provision.

Since this research has examined the specific education discourses of Omani and other Arab bureaucrats and teacher trainers it should be clear that culture plays a significant role in the way disability is fitted (or not) into the education system (Leyser et al, 1994). Key to cultural adaptations must be resource availability; it is no surprise that those countries most supportive of SEN provision and specifically of inclusion are among the world's richest, the US and Germany (Opdal et al, 2001). The development of global education discourses dominated by the wealthiest states has an impact on the way SEN is perceived everywhere. Such discourses do affect the key respondents in this research, whether directly in positive and constructive ways, or negatively as alien irritants.

The percentage of those children in developing countries with SEN – or at least those SENs recognized – is set to increase (Mittler, 1993) just as it is increasing in Oman (see chapter 1.4). There are therefore common experiences. Many of the elements identified

by teachers at the three special schools in chapter 5 as "problematic" – including lack of IST and poor collegiality – have also been given as factors influencing SEN provision worldwide (Opdal et al, 2001: 144-145). Importantly, what Al-Belushi (2004) identifies as the problem of poor vocationality is considered key to SEN provision (Opdal et al, 2001: 145) in terms of "teaching efficacy".

Commonality of interest in SEN does not suggest practical equality between states; similar problems do not promote a parity of exchange between Western and non-Western hemispheres. SEN could become another arena for cultural imperialism – a soft imperialism where inappropriate pedagogic practices that ignore local sensitivities, resources and different needs may be imported (Kisanji, 1993) at least in terms of suggested best practice. There may thus develop unnecessary distances between pedagogic practice and theory.

Another aspect of inequality and development may be expressed in the way the rush to modernize also standardizes. Corbett and Slee (2000: 138) point out the contradiction of political standardization – useful and inevitable in the development of emerging states – which suggests modernization, yet runs contrary to practices such as inclusion and indeed any effective SEN provision that are based on philosophies embracing difference.

Local and non-standard does not necessarily mean backward or discriminatory (Soodak et al, 1998). The need is for deeper local sensitivity, starting at the pedagogical principles which are universal but not seeking simply to import methods, ideas or practices

(Hegarty, 1998): such sensitivity was the basis for the 1994 Salamanca Declaration. But the Declaration, laying as it does great stress on exactly those processes of decentralization that ignore the developing drive to national identity may, as Corbett and Slee (2000) suggest, be unworkable.

A comparative perception of SEN issues should deliver a certain thickness – a better and more truthful picture, not necessarily of current practice but of the nature of education, the nature of disability, and the nature of education for those with SEN. Part of this thickness should be a workable understanding of how those with SEN *and* all students, teachers and parents are best served by the solutions to exclusion. How relevant, for instance, is the notion of inclusion to the Omani classroom – or indeed the English classroom (Warnock, 2005)? If inclusion "is about cultural synergies for an ever-broadening range of human identity" (Corbett and Slee, 2000: 134) then why is it only apparent in any meaningful sense in wealthy countries, and even there only in certain areas and schools? What cultural synergies can there truly be in the practice of a few elite, closed education systems in New Mexico or North Rhine Westphalia? At an academic level it may be easier to say that "diversity is a social fact" – which is also not difficult to acknowledge – but in the classroom of a small, under-resourced school in Oman is such an acknowledgement useful or meaningful? Well-meaning designations of social need may mean less in the constraints of a developing nation concerned with operating and standardizing a young education system (Opdal, 2001). SEN provision could do more harm than good if it fails to recognize "the complexity of identity and difference" (Corbett and Slee, 2000: 137) across international boundaries. Western

models of education are not "superior" (Armstrong et al, 2000: 4) and the danger of some SEN concepts lies in their worthy but Westernized dogma. SENs identification and provision, done with limited sensitivity on an imported model, may displace many-layered local practice creating a labelling or defining of children, which may not fit local cultural discourses (see chapter 2.2 and table 2.1). Practices of different cultures should only be compared with the twin benefits of humility and pedagogic theoretical depth (McDonnell, 2000: 12; 26), what Hegarty terms "abstraction and re-embodiment". Care must be taken to use only appropriately universal pedagogy.

> It is not practice that transfers from one system to another, but the principles that inform it. By abstracting the principles that underlie good practice in one context, we acquire the possibility of embedding them in different practice in another context. This process of abstraction and re-embodiment is indirect and can be difficult, but it is essential. Any short-circuiting of it is likely to result in inappropriate transfer of practice. (Hegarty, 1998: 112)

The problem highlighted in the research is the lack of depth in perception of SENs and SEN provision among many education professionals. In this situation "inappropriate transfer of practice" is more likely, losing the principles that underlie good practice *en route*. This discursive vacuum does not discriminate.

The reverse of a discursive vacuum effect is the nationalist rejection of alien experiences as irrelevant – a phenomenon noted among some respondents in this research. Vlachou-Balafouti and Zoniou-Sideris suggest, in the Greek context, that there is a lack of learning from other countries (2000: 34). Those interviewees in this research whose minds appeared least open to the possibility that interesting and useful pedagogy was occurring

outside Oman and the Arab world, and might be learnt from, those for whom better SEN provision and the notion of difference was not the foundation for good teaching, are merely the microcosmic reflection of those who see Westernized education practices – such as inclusion – as a global panacea.

It may be suggested that without a strong grounding in the "abstract principles" of SEN provision another likelihood is a drift into "a culture of segregation and mystique around difference" (Armstrong [et al], 2000: 64). But this response to SEN provision has, at its roots, a uniquely French education ideology where the classroom should be, ideally, a world of *égalité* and *fraternité* untouched by the religious, social and racial divisions that disfigure wider civism. The French system is also more prone to the medicalization and pathologization of SENs (see chapter 6.2) partly because of the strength of the medical profession socially that may create a preference for pseudo-diagnostic pedagogic practice. But does the recognition of the limits of inclusion necessarily make for the practice of exclusion? This would depend on socio-cultural environment and political will.

The research has suggested an education policy disconnection: "the gaps between the rhetoric of ... official documents and the reality of practice" (Hegarty, 1998: 113) is one aspect of the policy bead thread's effect. This gap is an expansion of a system that determines the work of power from the top; it is manifest as communicative and perceptive inadequacies between social strata, between cultures, and maybe within a single culture between different generations. As Hegarty suggests, this disjunction may

be a common phenomenon; in terms of this thesis, it may exist in a much wider context than Oman, or even than other developing states.

9.8: Future research – some concluding thoughts

There is a great deal that needs to be done in the field of SEN in Oman and pedagogy in general. If one deficit of this research has been the concentration on a small group of teacher trainers and bureaucrats, in future this could be obviated by research that *involves* a wider swathe of Omani society, reflecting better the complexity of a culture in transition, and perhaps reflecting it without hierarchical biases.

There are also questions which future research might seek to answer. Could (1) increased awareness of SEN in teacher training programmes and (2) the earlier detection of SEN offer a more secure foundation for the solution of the current lack of understanding among educational professionals in Oman? Might (3) increased awareness and earlier detection be first steps in altering perceptions of the needs for SEN provision, and (4) might increased awareness among teacher trainers offer a way forward? If so, (5) should awareness be linked to new education policy structures – structures which do not generate or use dependent relationships? (6) Would the de-pathologizing of SEN offer a partial solution to current discursive avoidance or denials, confusion, misunderstandings and prejudice? (7) Are partial solutions, such a special schools and variable integration of those with SEN, either satisfactory or desirable? (8) How can perceptions and ideologies – the discourses that drive educational provision from ministry to classroom – be altered overall?

There is still a need to know how aware teacher trainers, teachers and those not directly involved in education – and not just those interviewed here – are thinking about SEN: understanding this can help develop policy, and prepare teacher training programmes, as well as affect how people treat those with SEN – and with disablements generally – and, equally important, question some of the negative ways in which those with differences may see themselves while living within a traditional society. There is a need to raise and even create awareness of SEN in crucial areas; not only within the teaching and teacher training remit of this study, but also more widely among parents, health care professionals, students, policy-makers, religious leaders and society as a whole. There is also a need, for a small country with limited resources, not to allow any human potential to be wasted. Oman is not so well-endowed with population and trained personnel to have the luxury of being able to forego the opportunities represented by a sizeable proportion of that population. Those with SEN have as much to offer their society as those with no detectable or recognized differences. As Oman develops and changes, the contribution of all citizens will be economically and socially vital.

The findings of the core interview analyses are that increased awareness could help more effective integration or even inclusion of some or all SEN categories into mainstream schooling. When adding these analyses to the quantitative data of chapter 5, there is evidence that inclusion would not necessarily be inimical to the Omani system as it currently exists, and that the policy/concept disjunction dissected in chapter 8 might be overcome by a more thoughtful and communicative education policy-making process.

Future research might usefully reflect the heterogeneity and potential energies of Omani society, reflecting a fuller range of discourses, most especially those belonging to groups denied access to the services and opportunities which most take for granted. This research suggests how possible future studies could usefully and fruitfully – and fascinatingly – engage with an Omani society linked to regional and global pedagogic and disablement discourses.

It might be useful to leave the last word with one of those interviewed in 2003 – Dunya.

> [At a departmental meeting] I suggested we introduce a [SEN] subject [into the teacher training course], it would benefit students so much after graduation when they go out to their schools. I suggested the title "learning difficulties" [as a subject] and they [department heads] agreed. I was asked to talk about the idea at the meeting, so I did and straight away they changed the subject. [My female students] were shocked when they heard. Still I try to communicate an interest [in SEN] and give them some information. … I do a top-up quiz [in SEN] which helps. (Dunya, interviewed 2003)

Dunya is a woman of contradictions, whose dynamism, humour and personal commitment are unusual attributes after several years working under the Omani educational bureaucracy and within the teacher training system. She is by no means the only such island of resistance and integrity. There are many like her whose work and energy is vital yet dissipated in an education policy system dominated by downward pressures and by acceptances that the way things are done is the only way they could be done. Dunya's students constitute a new generation of teachers whose levels of awareness, sense of shock at the gaps in the teacher training curriculum, and thirst for

real, practical knowledge, suggest there is a positive reservoir of considerable proportions waiting to be tapped.

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APPENDIX A

THE QUESTIONNAIRE, RESEARCHER OBSERVATIONS AND RESPONSES FROM THE THREE SPECIAL SCHOOLS, MARCH 2001.

<u>QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHING STAFF at THE SPECIAL SCHOOLS</u>

[Translated from the original Arabic]

I AM CURRENTLY DOING A PhD IN THE UK ON TEACHER TRAINING AND SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN OMAN. THE INFORMATION YOU PROVIDE WILL BE USED FOR MY RESEARCH, WILL HELP TO EXPAND THE CURRENT DATABASE AND AID FUTURE DEVELOPMENT.

ANY RESPONSES WILL BE TREATED IN THE UTMOST CONFIDENCE.

PLEASE FILL IN THE ANSWERS, WHERE APPROPRIATE, AS FULLY AS POSSIBLE

1. Nationality .....

2. Sex .....

3. When did you start at this school? .....

4. What academic (or other relevant **and /or** Special Educational Needs) qualifications do you have? What is your specialization?
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   .....
   .....

5. What in-service training courses or relevant workshops or other schemes have you attended, and when? What were the titles of the courses? Do you have any further details?
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6. If you attended any courses did you find these helped with your work? If yes, how? If no, why not?
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7. In your job, what problems do you or have you faced?

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8. What specific suggestions do you have for improvements? Give as many details as possible.

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TARBIYEH FEKRIYEH SCHOOL

RESEARCHER OBSERVATIONS

Observations of the Tarbiyeh Fekriyeh School, and the thirty-one questionnaires filled out by the staff, created a significant picture of SEN-specific education in Oman. The facilities themselves were limited and basic when compared with mainstream establishments. Their appearance was distinctly temporary (prefabricated "portacabin" style buildings anchored on hard standing, closely-linked and with lavatory and some other facilities inconveniently situated). The obvious negative comparison with mainstream buildings would suggest clear educational priorities expressed by the Ministry of Education. It should be noted that such prefabricated structures do not give adequate protection from the profound summer heat (temperatures of more than fifty degrees can be reached in the summer months). But this belied an incredible level of commitment by the staff – especially the Omanis. Although Egyptians and Tunisians made up the majority of the forty-seven staff (twenty-four of this group answered questionnaires) and Omanis were much the minority (only seven answered questionnaires), it seemed to me that the Omanis made up for their minority status by an emotional commitment. Typical of this was the headmistress, among the longest-serving members of staff, yet someone who was happy to show she did not necessarily follow the rules – for example regarding the validity of IQ testing. There seemed, therefore, to be an implicit ideological tension since admission required an IQ test from SQU.

Amongst the staff there was a wide range of qualifications, the largest groups having DipEds or BEds, or SEN Diplomas (with a specialization identified as "mental"). Twenty

of the thirty-one questionnaire respondents have worked at the school only since its move to the current location in 1997.

The school takes a wide swathe of ages – from seven to twenty-four years. Judging by the comments in the questionnaires, this causes some significant problems in terms of behaviour and discipline. There is also some suggestion that mixing sexes may cause particular problems. The roll of nearly three hundred seems to be perceived rather too homogenously by the educational authorities: one of the most repeated criticisms was that the use of unaltered mainstream curriculum was inappropriate. Suggestions were that there should be an "appropriate" curriculum, tailored to those with SEN. Interestingly, what changes to teaching materials were needed were made by the staff themselves, and surprisingly no foreign language texts were available. There were no Omani tests available, only a Kuwaiti import. An important problem, perhaps not limited to SEN, but of particularly importance in SEN provision, was class size. The class ratio of 1:13 (rather than a stated ideal of 1:8) would prove problematic the more mixed the student ages, or the higher the age range.

The overall facilities of the School were limited: useful areas such as carpentry and other handicraft training were poorly supplied with the necessary materials; the lack of SEN-specific equipment was mentioned by six respondents. The reasons for poor supply were clearly budgetary. PE and other sporting facilities were basic, although there were two playing fields for volleyball and football. Responses in questionnaires suggest that sharing facilities with mainstream schools would be useful, though one may wonder whether filling holes in provision by "borrowing" from elsewhere (presumably at times dictated by the owners of those facilities) would be useful in the long term.

The Muscat municipality is not a small area: it is larger and much less accessible than the area of Greater London. As was pointed out in the questionnaire responses, and picked out by my discovery that the School is served by only 13 buses daily, it would be better to have either more bus services or some boarding facilities – or both.

The questionnaires did point up some important shortfalls in terms of the pedagogy and sociology of SEN provision. The level of communication between teachers, and between teachers and parents was considered inadequate. Parents' attitudes (or level of understanding of their children's needs) as well as wider social awareness were picked out by respondents as problems needing addressing. Interestingly, media were seen by five respondents to be a key to lowering stigma attached to SEN.

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS (TOTAL RESPONDENTS = 31):

1. GENDER

Female: 24
Male: 7

2. NATIONALITY

Egyptian: 19
Tunisian: 5
Omani: 7

3. QUALIFICATIONS (Some teachers had more than one qualification)

DipEd: 15
DipSEN: 4
DipSEN (Mental): 14
DipSEN ("vocational"): 1
Dip Agriculture: 1
Dip Health/Hygiene: 1

BEd: 6
BA SEN: 4
BTech: 2
BSc: 1

Nanny Qualification: 4
Speech Training Specialization: 1
PE Handicapped Qualification: 1
Nursery pre-School (mental): 1

4. YEARS EMPLOYED

1: 3
2: 4
3: 6
4: 3
5: 2
6: 2
7: 3
8: 1
9: 3
10: 1
11: 1
12: 0
13: 1
14: 0
15: 2

5. PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED

Uncontrolled behaviour: 10

Unsocial/inappropriate behaviour: 6

Parents: 10
Lack of Communications between Teachers and Parents: 4
Lack of Communication between Teachers: 3

Social Awareness: 2

No SEN Inspectors: 2
No SEN-Specific Vocational Guide: 2
No Psychiatric/other Specialists: 5

Curriculum: 16
Lack of Teaching Resources: 5
Finances: 1
Inaccessibility of Schools (no Boarding Facilities): 4

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Workshops: 7

Increase Parental Awareness: 5
Better Parent-Teacher Communication: 6
Redefinition of SEN (Lowering Stigma): 4

Improved Media Role/Increase Social Awareness: 5

More Experts: 3
Assistants: 1
Better Healthcare: 1
SEN-Specific Inspectors: 1

More IST: 8
SEN Curriculum Needed: 13
Better/More Appropriate Timetabling: 3
Smaller Classes: 1
Split Classes (by Gender): 1
Separate Classes for SEN: 3
SEN-Specific Equipment: 6

Buses (Accessibility): 1

SEN Schools in more areas: 1
Link SEN and "Ordinary" Schools: 1

Artisanal Activities: 1

AL-AMAL SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF

RESEARCHER OBSERVATIONS

Although some of the areas considered problematic, and some of the recommendations are clearly similar to those from the questionnaires at the other schools, I felt that there was possibly more collusion among respondents evinced by the similarities in their responses under the "Problems" and "Recommendations" sections. This may have been coincidental, but the similarity of the words and phrases used suggests not.

Al Amal school is a government school whose facilities are better than the privately-funded school for the blind and mentally retarded, but even here problems of class size, behaviour, parental ignorance and lack of appropriate support take their toll.

As with other sectors of the education system, staff are sourced from a range of other Arab states: of the 27 respondents only 9 were Omani. The countries supplying teachers were the same group – Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia; the Egyptians were the majority. (The headmistress is an Omani of 17 years' experience.) This may represent problems in forthcoming years as Omanization continues in the wider economy. The female to male ratio was 5:22. Most teachers either had a DipEd or DipSEN (the latter related to the SEN specialism of Al Amal).

Also the width of the ages taken is very great – from 6 to 22 years; one teacher (fewer than was the case for the respondents from the Tarbiyeh Fekriyeh school) felt classes were too large and that there should be sexual segregation. Interestingly, Al Amal's policy is rigidly segregationalist when it comes to allowing other disabilities into the school: a deaf person with some other SEN would not be eligible. This may either reflect a lack of appropriate resources or, perhaps, an ideological stricture that perceives deafness as different or even superior to other forms of SEN.

Facilities vary: there was some specialized equipment for IT, sport, carpentry and sewing. Boarding facilities, bizarrely, go unsupervised over weekends. 13 buses are available – well below a number adequate to the needs (Al Amal is the only school for the deaf in the country.) A lack of teaching materials is felt by 5 respondents.

The curriculum, once again, was the single most important subject for respondents, and, again, the criticism is that it does not cater for the special needs of Al Amal's students. 12 thought there should be some curricular changes. There was also some concern expressed as to the adequacy of IST – 12 respondents express the desire for more, and 8 feel that IST had improved classroom skills. There were no negative reactions to IST. Arabic was the only language for subject teaching, and grading was two years behind mainstream schools. (Only two respondents felt the need for some kind of "integration".) There is no difference in examinations set between government mainstream and Al Amal.

Again, parents were seen as a significant problem: they were uncooperative, did not give appropriate care and lacked knowledge about their child's SEN. 6 respondents felt

parents needed some kind of education in SEN, or "awareness" training. I got the impression that parental cooperation and understanding depended very much on socio-economic group. Although some socialization problems were perceived among students, this is offset by the perceived need for more specialists – from psychologists to "better qualified staff" in general.

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS– (TOTAL RESPONDENTS = 27)

1. Gender

Male – 5
Female – 22

2. Nationality

Egyptian – 14
Omani – 9
Tunisian – 3
Jordanian – 1

3. QUALIFICATIONS (Some teachers had more than one qualification)

BA - 2
BA (Agriculture) – 1
BA (Home Economics) – 1
BA (Psychology) – 3
BA (SEN) – 2
BEd – 3

Diploma (SEN: auditory/vocational training/visual) – 18
DipEd – 12
Diploma (speech therapy) – 1
Diploma (Fine Art) – 1

Certificate (Disabled Rehabilitation) – 1
Certificate (Speech Therapy) – 1
Training Course (Home Economics) – 1

4. YEARS EMPLOYED

1 - 2
2 - 2
3 - 3
4 - 6
6 - 3
7 - 3

9 - 1
10 - 1
12 - 2
15 - 1
16 - 1
17 - 1
18 - 1

5. IN-SERVICE TRAINING WORKSHOPS/COURSES ATTENDED

"Simple" Disabilities – 1
Arabic Signing – 22
Braille Computer – 1
Deaf Child Education (France) – 1
Design of SEN Teaching Materials – 2
Early Detection – 1
Home Economics - 1
Individual SEN Teaching – 1
Integration – 2
IT – 1
Learning Difficulties – 3
Oral Communication – 2
SEN / SEN Curriculum – 2
Teaching Materials – 3

6. RESPONSE TO IST:

(No negative responses)

Updating Knowledge – 5
Helped Improve Teaching Techniques – 8
Enhanced Career – 1
Improved Ability to Deal with Students – 2
Employing Unified Signing – 2
Gain New Experience – 1
Useful for Students – 1

Generally "Useful" or "Helpful" (no specifics) – 10

7. PROBLEMS

Students:

With more than 1 Disability – 1
Lack of Support (Specialists/Inspectors) – 4

No Understanding – 3
Poor Socialization – 2
Careless Work – 1
Too Wide a Variety of Disability – 2
No Diagnosis – 1
No Therapy - 1

Parents:

Lack of Knowledge – 6
Do not Give Appropriate Care – 4
Do not Cooperate – 3
Lack of Family Counselling - 2

Public:

Lack of Public Awareness - 1

Teachers:

Need Encouragement and Motivation – 3
Class Management – 1
Communication with Students – 1

Lack of Academic Follow-up – 1
Lack of IST - 1
Lack of Special Curriculum – 11
Poor Teaching Materials / No Teaching Materials – 5

Having to Cover Subjects other than their Specialization – 1

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

More In-Service Training – 12
More In-Service Training in countries with SEN experience – 1
More In-Service Training designed for Deaf - 1

Specialized Curriculum (designed for Deaf) – 12
Better Equipment – 6
New Technology – 4
Review Educational Programmes – 4
Additional levels beyond secondary – 2
Integration of Students – 2
Field Trips – 2
More Lip-reading Training – 1
More Job-Related Training – 1

Decreased Class Size (approx 10) – 1
Sex Segregation – 1
Extra-Curricular Activities – 1
Pre-School Classes – 1

Provide counsellor – 2
More Qualified/Specialized Staff – 1
Early Detection - 2

Involvement of / Greater Awareness of Parents – 6

OMAR BIN ALKHATAB SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND

RESEARCHER OBSERVATIONS

The architectural layout was well designed with the needs of students clearly in mind, and with sections for different ages: of the three schools examined, this may have been the one whose design was best thought out. UNESCO is provisionally engaged in designing IT equipment, the only major NGO involved in any of the three schools. Also, Alkhatab has the highest teacher-student ratio of any of the three schools, at 1:10.

Because only 8 teachers responded to the questionnaires, issues raised may be of limited generalizability. There were no obvious clusters, though some possible parallels with those questionnaires carried out in the other two schools. Poor teaching materials, once again, was felt by one respondent to be important. Curiously, one of the problems identified was that "Limited Intelligence" – (1 respondent) – proved a difficulty. Like the other schools which only accept their own particular SEN with no combination with other disabilities, Omar Bin Alkhatab only accepts blind students. In this context, the response makes sense. The teacher seems to see their job as dealing with that SEN for which they have been trained, and any complication of that specialization is unwarranted. This was magnified in another response that "blind since birth, so no prior knowledge of environment" (1 respondent) which suggests that poor cognitive or communication skills may not be dealt with in this teacher's model of their job. I also wonder whether there is not some prejudice within the SEN teaching community against other forms of disability – especially against mental disabilities.

Once again, there was some concerns evinced about parental knowledge and involvement – one of the common findings of the questionnaires – the need for greater SEN awareness of parents – (2 respondents) and the need for parent-teacher meetings – (1 respondent), suggests parents may be poorly informed. Perhaps once again this problem is because of poor education, poor female education, and a lack of available medical information of expertise; many parents live in distant regions which can only be reached with difficulty. In such areas superstitious or negative attitudes to disability may persist; certainly it is difficult for medical services to provide guidance and support in such areas. Since many Alkhatab students live on campus (42) there may be an ideological disjunction: parents from lower socioeconomic groups who are not in regular contact with the school, do not see what is being done, and are unable to access parent-teacher activities (when these are available). Their child remains "unusual" because they do not get a chance to see the functioning collegiate activities where many other children, much like their own, are seen as "normal" rather than "deviant".

Alkhatab, following the practice of only dealing with the specific SEN for which it was designed, only has links either with the Al Noor Association for the Blind, or with other basic institutions caring for the blind. Wider SEN cooperation is not considered necessary. Once again, this may encourage pedagogic prejudices. Respondents did highlight a lack of teacher intercommunication, and teacher stress (1 respondent each) which were not shown in responses to other questionnaires. The plan to turn books into

Braille relies greatly on teachers' commitment rather than any planned curricular projected by the Ministry of Education.

QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES: TOTAL RESPONDENTS = 8

1. Gender

Male – 3
Female – 5

2. Nationality

Egyptian – 7
Omani – 1

3. QUALIFICATIONS (Some teachers had more than one qualification)

BA (Fine Art) - 1
BA (PE) – 1
BSc - 1
BA (SEN) – 1
BEd – 1

Diploma (SEN: visual) – 6
DipEd – 4
Diploma (Music) – 1
Diploma (Child / Teen Psychology) – 1
Diploma (Psychological Health) – 1

4. YEARS EMPLOYED

1 - 2
2 - 3
3 - 1
11 - 1

5. IN-SERVICE TRAINING WORKSHOPS/COURSES ATTENDED

Guidance and Care of the Blind - 1
Child and Mother - 1
Curriculum Development for the Blind – 1
Audio-Visual Development – 1
Children's Rights – 1
Maths for the Blind – 4
Perkins Typing Machine (Braille Course) – 1
Physiotherapy and First Aid – 1

Karate – 1
Bowling for the Blind – 1
IT – 2
Behavioural Treatment – 1
Teaching Materials – 1

6. RESPONSE TO IST:

(No negative responses – though under IST, the IT course was called "irrelevant")

Gain New Experience – 2
Useful for Work – 2
Helped Develop Blind Curriculum – 1
Helped Improve Teaching Techniques – 1
More Experience – 1
Updating Knowledge – 1
Widened Horizon – 1

7. PROBLEMS

Students:

"Limited Intelligence" – 1
"Blind since birth so no prior knowledge of environment" [sic] – 1

Parents:

Lack of Disability Awareness – 1

Teachers:

Poor Teaching Materials (Lack of Books) – 1
Teaching Load too Great – 1

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

More In-Service Training – 2

Better Equipment – 1

Teacher Intercommunication – 1
Alleviation of Teacher Stress – 1

Greater SEN Awareness of Parents – 2
Need for Parent-Teacher Meetings – 1

APPENDIX B

2003 INTERVIEW DATA SET GRID

This grid is designed to make the responses in the interviews as accessible as possible, acting as an *aide memoire*. Accessibility in conceptual terms is also important – what are the overall patterns of thought visible in and across the various interviews.

For this data set the idea of coding and analysis were much more central, and the codes themselves were no longer seen as set in stone. The x axis (names of respondents) boxes were filled not just with direct quotes, but, according to the y-axis codes, also included basic analytic points which feed in to the analysis chapters. Sometimes the codes themselves were porous, and allowed responses to those areas of interviews which either overlapped different coding categories, or escaped those categories altogether.

GRID FOR INTERVIEWS (2003)

ISSUES	SAMIR	MAHER	SALWA	DUNYA
Appearance/perception (*The dichotomy between apparent qualities of SEN categories, and subjective perception of those categories*)	Importance of appearance / behaviour in acceptance of those with SEN. How disabled see themselves; how they are seen	Lack of recognition of SEN; low priority. SEN not identified with integration	Perception of SEN students as low intelligence and "suffering"	Positive perception of attitudes evinced by TTs
Terminology/language (*The SEN-specific and disability-specific vocabulary used*)	Qualms about using "mental retardation"; nevertheless use of "normal" and "flawless" – / normal and abnormal also used. SEN seen as a flaw; "complete disability"	Normal vs deviations; slow-learning; defects; mental and physical disabilities; normal/abnormal; deviations and problems;	Simple language: "those with SN are the mentally disabled". SEN students differ from "normal". Hierarchy of ability: at the top/superiority, at the bottom disablement.	SEN students are best "handled" or "controlled" – ie an awkward problem coped with, or "dealt with". Normal students for normal schools – yet some doubt about what "normal" means
Categories/categorization (*Categories used to identify types of SEN and disability – "labelling"*)	Categories mobile / intelligence may be "enhanced". "Normal" used in opposition to "disabled". Importance of "judging", but equally "need to distinguish" "levels of understanding". Complete or "sub" disability; some subtlety in categorization	Use of tests – esp mental tests to allow a clear demarcation normal and abnormal. Tests useful to "clarify".	Simple concepts of SEN classification. Use of tests (specifically IQ)	SEN as a separate specialism – categorization as an antidote to over-complexity. Definition of clear types of SEN of help to teachers. "Intellectual" education separate from SEN education. Testing helps invest categories with validity. "Diagnosis" a mechanism of identification
Attitude; theory/practice (paradigm) (*The way concepts are linked together to create a paradigm of SEN and disability; and the link between developed paradigms and theories of practice*)	Positive attitude to provision within a conservative paradigm – disability may "recede" with treatment.	SEN / disability pathologized; no interest in SEN concepts such as integration / segregation. SEN TT only for those interested in specializing – a lack of personal awareness. A student as a blank sheet of	Exclusion explicitly preferred – as "better" than inclusion: a clearly segregationalist paradigm	SEN perceived as unique sets of identifiable needs "every disability has its own ways and means". A perception of variety yet this does not extend to an inclusive paradigm. Communication

		paper		the key to developing theory and practice. Dislike of wider social attitudes of limited sympathy. An understanding that there are problems
Strategies & policy (*How individuals conceive of "dealing with" students with SEN, and considerations of those relevant aspects of government policy*)	Programmes and educational strategy to "incorporate" those with SEN	Absence of clear policy or perceived need	Use testing to "distribute" SEN students to the appropriate organizations	Perceived as one of moving from exclusion (in "annexes") to inclusion. A need to "talk about" current divisions, and change and develop a clear SEN philosophy.
SEN ideology/identification (*The ideological structure behind the perception of SEN and disablement: the way ideology may affect the manner of identifying SEN*)	Some conception of category inadequacy, but matched with conservative attitudes. Important understanding of variety of differences, and that "everyone is subject to treatment" / Pass SEN "alertness" to students. Mix of exclusive and inclusive philosophies	Low priority for SEN – one project out of many: "I really have no idea on how SE is studied". Ideological simplification	Identification by testing allows exclusive policy of separate education – simple classification suggesting SEN seen as a "simple" category	Less ignorance and more holistic perception including parents / families. A policy of inclusion. Fear of the complexities of SEN, and even of some kind of negative effect of inclusion on other students, yet paradoxically the need to understand / develop some kind of SEN philosophy.
Empowerment and / or including gender (*If and how SEN students, their parents and more widely those with disabilities, are empowered or considered to be empowered by policy or education; the position of gender in consideration of relative power*)	Hope to give the SEN child chances "to achieve something"	Those with SEN separate – no suggestion of empowerment; sons the objects of education	Use of families to help those with SEN	Need to develop complex perception – yet those with SEN do not have rights but rather may be "allowed" to enjoy some facilities
Change/social analyses (*Considerations of change as it is affected by or affects Omani society*)	Effort to develop Oman; importance of equality and a certain inclusiveness	Better attention in future – but only in terms of clearer categorization and more talking; development of databases; a project	What is being done is enough – "trying their best" /need to change curriculum – but fear of change	Need to change the "idea of the teacher" and to be more detached and less emotional: example of UAE

		of "4 or 5 years". Oman "stuck in a time frame and certain curriculum" – the feeling that the situation should be accepted rather than changed	being somehow in the wrong hands Current social attitudes to SEN "natural"	

ISSUES	SHAIMA	ZAID	NAADER	LOAI
Perception and categorization; the appearance of SEN; categories used	SEN as a minor issue, to be "sorted out" by voluntary arrangements. But a sense of the importance of SEN – so that it should occur earlier in the TT curriculum – 2nd rather than 4th year. Others may feel basic sympathy towards such people.	Recognition that SN represents 13% of the population; but only 10% with SEN (contradiction?) who would be better "in special schools". Lack of awareness a problem – information about SEN elusive for public. Division according to behavioural types: a scientific categorization – "behaviour change / disablement / learning difficulties". Teachers prepared by "giving [them] all the various categories".	"Psychologically / socially / physically disabled" as well as the usual categorization according to type (deaf / blind) and behaviour. Also reference to "moral" disability and "linguistic" disability. Needs met by "teachers trained the best we can"	During teens impact of disability "becomes more apparent". "Treatment" and "analysis" as part of the diagnosis. Disablement increasing. Categorization recognition helped by "galleries". Problems created when TTs "reject dealing with SEN", aim of TTCs to make TTs "ready to deal" with SEN: teachers should be prepared and have knowledge, and "family should help compliment the role of the school". Economic considerations – those with SEN should make up 5% of the workforce. A collective perception of the meeting of SEN
Terminology and language	"Learning difficulties" and the further use of "difficulties", which may need to be "overcome" suggests a negative but not dismissive conceptualization of SEN, which needs to be "handled". However, "deal with her normally" used in the case of Fatma,	Complex modern designation preferred: "students of challenges" under which are "learning and mental disabilities", and "simple" or "slow learners" or those with "problematic behaviour". Preference	Disablement a bad situation which must not be "worsened"; linguistic disability (?) should be "corrected"; psychological problems linked to "deterioration"; health, normality opposite to disability; someone "born normal" later	"A deprived category of people" equation of disablement and social exclusion. "Childhood troubles" / "learning difficulties" suggest a socio-psychological

	included.	for "American scientific names", avoidance of terms such as "disabled" or "lunatic". Encouragement of concept of "difference". But all students need to be "dealt with", and words such as "normal" and "abnormal" used, as are "strange and terrible cases" – a certain pathologization suggested through using "treat" rather than educate.	became "blind and disabled". Omani experience as "simple and normal". The disabled person must be "handled and dealt with". Exclusion or segregation of "dangerous cases".	interpretation of SEN. Disabilities can be "surmount-ed" if "carefully handled", but "normal" still the comp to SSEN, and "high mark" also comp., "normal" vs "abnormal". Teachers must "deal with serious problems". SEN promlemat-ized – "severe" disability. "We should accept the disabled as they are and **rectify wrong behaviour.**"
Attitude / paradigms of practice / theory and SEN ideology / identity theory and concepts of gender and empowerment	SEN students can be "calmed down" to give others a "better chance" suggests a hierarchy of educational need. SEN pupils *will be better* "dealt" with when awareness among teachers is greater. Awareness of "symptoms" important. Deeper inculcation of awareness earlier in TTC (2nd year) considered valuable, with "better supervision". "Practical" issues important. Need to link social class/ "status" and background with systemic provision, and involve parents and social workers in a "suitable psychological environment": a *holistic* paradigm, facilitated by school management. No proper courses for TTs on evaluating pupils	"Difference" the key word and paradigmatic concept, linked with a scientific rationalization of SEN. *A design to* be modern in practice – a detachment. However extant categorization used, and SEN students pathologized to a certain extent – they are determined in present need to be "treated" rather than in a deeper causational linkage. But awareness that there are subtle shades of difference rather than absolutes – exampled in the exam given to students cited. Practice hierarchically determined, and this is criticised implicitly "those at the top are not making decisions unless those at the bottom are aware".	Voluntarism the key to provision "we can work … voluntarily". No clear paradigm of care except doing the *best – very non-*scientific ("not a medical issue" but then again "treatment" should be possible *in utero*) almost chaotic personalized, ad hoc code: "a girl came to me and I came to know she had psychological problems", and in another case where he deals with a suicide he "chalked out a line for him". A narrow paradigm of Omani practice as "simple and normal" linked to a very clear religious paradigm "disability in our religion is that God tests the good believers" leading him to "prefer the voluntary way of handling the disability matter".	Acceptance a key word in creation of paradigm, this balanced with a need to help a child "realize the [nature *of their]* disability" and thus create an "identity" – paradigm of empowerment – encouraging and enhancing student perform-ance. Strong sense of self-help and "adaptation" to social environ-ment – increasing "practical know-ledge". Helped by better training & instruction of teachers. Problems of overcoming rejection by others, in a more manageable school environ-ment. Understand

			Clear ideas of "right and wrong" concepts	"differences" between disabled. – who "should be considered a normal person" – and "change their projection to the disabled". "Islamic curriculum" – opp to political paradigm [paradox here] hand in hand with appropriate legislation, plus "support and encouragement" within a social context.
Change and the future: social analyses	Growth in the awareness of SEN in courses	Implicit criticism of current hierarchical structure – those at the top only motivated by awareness from the bottom. Also implicit recognition of the importance of his own "expediting" role. Issue of hierarchical inertia – lack of political accountability or proper connection to wider social constituency	Support, finance, specialists and voluntary help required. Change based on better preventative medical work, and more centres for SEN	Disability "on the rise", attributed to the "inheritance factor" and the issue is "on the table" – though "we have a tough job ahead" convincing people that the disabled have social value (a/c to this resp a difficulty with Egyptians?)
Strategies and policy / current issues / practicalities	Link of TTC to the Al Wafa centres. Problems of parental understanding should be addressed through teachers having more sympathy. Overall need for more awareness, a "need for more attention".	"Guidance programme" submitted to ministry, for helping teachers. Importance of media in guiding	To follow the "proper" channel, and to use the models of other Gulf states	Coping with the increasing % of those with SEN – strategy of education and awareness – "preparation" and "exercises" for "dealing with the disabled person", involving the family to "compliment the role of the school", and a proper curriculum. A fair livelihood needed following education

ISSUES	ADIL	HUSSAIN	MUBARAK	HAMED
Perception and categorization; the appearance of SEN; categories used	Measurement and classific-ation helped by appro-priate train-ing. 50% categorized as "below average" – such statistics seen as important. Each category has specific and different needs: from "slight" to serious. "Big diff-erence" perceived between the "normal" and "SN" child – also in terms of objectives and skills – esp comm skills – "there will be no common language" – differentiate educationally the practical and educational.	Categorization according to IQ exams and motor tests, following Iraqi practice: determining difference between different levels of SEN; use of psychological supervisors. Recognition that diagnosis may cause "trouble". Nominated TTs sent to Jordan. Workshops throughout Oman – International referents generate categories.	Putative division established for "slow learners and poor sighted students" as well as those who fall through the system. Trainees have limited knowledge of SEN. Need to clarify SEN categories and concepts. SEN students need referral to SE schools and "social "rehabilitation unit". Mental disability more includable than physical. Visibility defines category – and severity of disability.	Vague perception of provision and what it covers, but acknowledgement of poor teacher preparation "they are not qualified enough" suggests SEN considered complex. But confusion evident in how those teachers might be qualified – 6 or 30 hours – and a sense that SEN is somehow a second class subject. Perception of SEN as a huge problem "we need 1000 teachers … we need 15 years to qualify these teachers", difficult, and not worth resolving?
Terminology and language	"Superior" through normal or "roughly average" to "below average" and "mental retardation"and "abnormal students" – hierarchical perception of potential. "Mobility" and "commonsense" and "linguistic" disabilities. Normal / "normal categories" opp to "special difficulties" and "weak mentalities". Learning difficulties are "suffered" by students and "imposes" itself on others.	"Learning difficulties" / "slow learner": SEN student "not fit to be with normal students + normal programme". "Inclusion" and "integration" used incorrectly. Hierarchy of retardation. Definition according to "problems" which are "defaults". "Normal" as opp to "mentally retarded" (prefers to use "learning difficulties") – use of "zakat" funds	Negative – "slow learning / poor sighted" SEN teacher and "normal teacher". Pathologizing language – "hearing and visual and mental diseases". SEN are "suffered", and varieties of SEN are prefixed by "difficulties". "Light, medium and severe mental disabilities"	"Normal [schools]" and "normal curriculum" – otherwise specific terminology generally avoided. "Slight mental abilities … severe mental problems"
Attitude / paradigms of practice / theory and SEN ideology / identity	Dismissive: "we don't deal in such [SEN] courses", suggestion that inclusion irrelevant unless in cases of misdiagosis, and admission of	First special classes opened 31 years ago (1972) – aim of SE "to serve the country" – preference for	Better curriculum is less "limited", and the available "social instructor" is not as important as a "female SE teacher"	"We don't touch on SEN … as we don't have the time" – dismissive attitude then comp with acknowledged need for

theory and concepts of gender and empowerment	widespread indifference, and that teaching "this category" "is too much" – overwhelmed by sense of complexity – SEN are brought up "too much" by colleagues – yet hope for further research. Importance of diagnosis based on a course of measurements, and of awareness. Importance of teacher of SEN for those children who might be *wrongly* diagnosed.	Omanization. Now 2 SEN courses for each graduate, plus "optional courses". Training SEN teachers in "14 diagnostic exams, 2 intelligence exams and 12 in mathematics and reading". Possible to "train" a student from a low IQ into "normality". Possible negative effects of inclusion – increasing workload and breadth of intake. Need for new course of 3/6 months to offset other priorities – input from UNESCO. Religious paradigm – "those who help the disabled will be rewarded by Allah … disability is not shame."	Desire to "clarify" the difference between SE and concepts of inclusion or exclusion. Wide conceptalization of "normal" – but merely shifting exclusive boundaries. Predicable model of small classes as a key for better provision, and equally predictable segregationalist paradigm – recognition that this may oppose notions of "social rehabilitation".	"complete awareness" offered by more teaching hours - though these hardly adequate – "6 hours over 4 years … to give them required general experience. Simplistic paradigm – though some recognition that the community's requirements should be studied. Suggestion of need for combined efforts of social worker, psychologist & specialist teacher again seems to contradict earlier pedagogic paradigm – confusion and discomfort? However the provision of a specialized teacher then considered adequate provision. Importance of awareness to prevent worsening situation. Segregation as practical answer to SEN – but a wish that their social "mingling" be facilitated.
Change and the future: social analyses	Need to include courses in SEN which itemize types of SEN – calls for such course without response – bureaucratic indifference. Also problem of poor (or no) diagnoses. More cooperation with the Al Wafa centre – "to gauge … intelligence levels". Workshop aims to develop curriculum. But no mention of SEN in development of new curriculum – "ignored totally". Educational health and psychology	Arab TT flaw failing to graduate TTs in SEN – failure in training and in use of diagnostic tools. Too little SEN background. Need for a programme at BA level, and for testing to be done by Arabs who can speak Arabic clearly. Need to prepare teachers, and have an early intervention for SEN – new	The future needs to be "addressed" - more adequate curricula, adequate number of SEN teachers who have majored in this specialization (a major introduced at the TTC), smaller classes where SEN students "receive proper attention" in specialist schools – integration not a preferred option.	Reconsideration of curricula – a more practical (less academic?) bent for SEN curriculum. Some subjects have "nothing to do with the community" – ie with fitting the disabled into society. SEN TT not at the expense of other subjects.

	only deal with "normal people" – lectures do not serve SEN. A diploma should be a pre-requisite for those involved in the field – and a course "for learning difficulties" - as is super-vision by the MoE. Community as a whole "is trying" and things have "started to move", but inclusion "involves great difficulties in terms of teachers themselves". Also problem of "negativity" of parents. Limited awareness.	programme to "familiarize women". Intelligence and psychological tests in courses for all teachers. Country ambitious for change – use of census information. Redirection of fiscal resources – anger and frustration linked to political priorities. Lack of awareness among social workers re psychological guidance and testing. Change happening – "zakat" and private funding, as well as community involvement. Awareness of global concepts – but also Omani character of "social shyness"		
Strategies and policy / current issues / practicalities	Requests for workshops from teachers and parents in order better to identify SEN categories. – Al Wafa centre key in this – as is future research. More media awareness and SEN education-al programmes. Need to release parents from "social pressures" and do the best to "eliminate negative effects" for those with SN.		A branch for SE + psychological guidance discussed. – practical IST for teachers, and more specialized teachers	

ISSUES	YAZEED	YOUNNIS	ISHAAQ	RIAD
Perception and categorization; the appearance of SEN; categories used	Reading, maths and "commonsense" skills" and thought categories of learning difficulties, dealt with by a "specialized work team". Also necessary to ID and explore the "long and short goals" – these themselves should be ID categories.	No clear SEN policy. Categorization according to "norms … compatible with society"; some "above" some below these norms, which are "a series of features … intelligence, aggression or goodness". Individual needs to "overcome" his disability or be a "burden" on his family.	SEN required "certain accurate measurements" tuned to every child's needs. Hierarchy of SEN with the "mentally weak" at the bottom. However classes in schools should be a "duplicate copy of life" rather than imposing categories. SEN seen as "simple", and a patronizing perception where SEN students "can be creative" – simplistic characterization: SEN due to "abnormal growth or slight hearing disability or big visual disability".	No specialization for SEN Courses linked, but with time restrictions.
Terminology and language	"persons/kids with SN", demonstrating "an anomaly"; "personal / social competency". Training is "Connective", and the SEN programmes use "medical intervention" to deal with disablement. "Normal schools" opp special schools	"Slow-learning students" – not "normal, like others", may have "individual deviations" and be a "burden" on family. "Mentally disabled" the most seriously "below the norm".	"Abnormal" psychology – "shortcomings in hearing and in talking": "hearing … visual … speech disabilities". Opp "normal students" are those with "learning disability … [who are] mentally disabled or have any sort of disability"	SEN students "suffer poor hearing [and] poor sighting"
Attitude / paradigms of practice / theory and SEN ideology / identity theory and concepts of gender and empowerment	"treatment" not just the aegis of teachers but of "other parties too". Need for "practical" TT re SEN within "normal" school environment. Medicalized model of practice (teacher with social worker and doctor – use of diagnostic tests – diagnosis determined	Clear hierarchical concept of SEN, a spectrum from "above" to "below" "the norm". A psychologized att – SEN added to TT courses "provided it is accompanied by 1 or 2 psychology subjects". SEN student needs "social assistance" and assistance from teacher to bring out innate abilities. This is a process not of	Playing "planned role" to help those with "shortcomings" – mild cases more easily addressed. In terms of T prov – a gender difference: "the girl is different to the boy … they are competitive" – and they need to have an SEN background and be able to ID SEN. Some SEN easily treated - "medicalized" paradigm determining	NB – admits not to know what goes on in schools. Need to "separate the education and employment processes" – not jobs for every grad – what effect on SEN? Does not see SQU as appropriate to meet SEN alone – but acknowledges importance of SEN with appropriate necessary pro-grammes. Encour-ages

	treatment) – entire "focus" of course on one book – *Learning Difficulties* – but need for more books. No understanding among academic comm. of how SEN affects the "entire community" – a need to research & evaluate teacher reactions over the years since SEN introduced at SQU in 2001. Need to give TTs a gradual intro over the 4 years to the subject – linking SEN & psych in one traing scheme with substantive practical element. Also SEN sld be an elemnt in all TTCs. But although a wide & inclusive concn. of SEN, "superior" skills considered better. Costs an important consdn in practice – limited resources allocated. Prereqs for inclusion listed, which excludes certain SENs as too deep for inclusion. Parents sld be on board & non-SEN students	empowerment but of normalization: "to help a person be normal like others". Need for graduate specialists in every school – with input from psychology dept. Need for attention as much as education from a teacher: "instructional teacher" replaced by guidance teacher. Crude definition of a new pedagogic philosophy. Advice to TTs to buy books and read for themselves – minimalist approach to TT? However, this should not have a political/social dimension, but only relating to "general behaviours", linked to community/family care, and the acknowledged importance of psychology "in the community". Costs approach to care – SEN linked to practical economics – more specialists and graduates while recognizing that is may not be worth "wasting" money on the mentally disabled.	inclusion/exclusion – treatable = includable; severity = exclusion Same courses the answer to all problems – OSFA Importance of "family awareness" More (medical) care for those with SEN = better chances. Medical/psychological specialists to monitor child's progress Integration a response to the negative and unreal structure of streaming – aim to create an education structure which mirrors "the real world" – the classroom a duplicate society. Teachers need to keep links with TTCs to keep them updated (use of IST) Simplistic paradigm of SEN provision since "facilities are available" and "the matter is simple". Improvements are made through better comm. between depts and personnel	fb if "thought-ful and real". Need for specialized teachers – no OSFA philosophy. Holistic approach to ed.: involving parents/teachers/ students/specialists /supervisors – teachers need to know as much as poss re student, and adopt a leading role. Better TT across all subject teachers "even the physics teachers". Stress on facilities – though not necessarily school psych or counsellors. The need recognized for an "ambitious practical programme" suggests a forward-moving modern paradigm of meeting SEN at all educational levels, but met on "personal initiative".
Change and the future: social analyses	New course on "Learning Difficulties for Al Majal Teachers" – need to increase	A lack of awareness – need for more "obligatory" courses. A separate major in SE – not just a	Change only embraced within existing model. In general, everything is hunky dory: "[the] general condition of the country is	"Dire need" for a "working plan" though not based on SQU initiative – though a masters in SEN a good

	awareness. Better qualified teachers, and all TT courses sld contain SEN component – to prep for all types of SEN. Better training led by Mof HE necessary. Survey needed to est which SEN are there and how these are being met. A "scientific programme" of diagnosis. Community not ready - needs to accept SEN – prepared by media – lack of acceptance due to lack of info. Evidence of a desire for info among teachers – but current individual efforts not enough Need to include the disabled in community Realisation of a need for change	diploma. The 1995 attempt to introduce SEN rebuffed. Although there is a strong resistance to SEN within the CofE, a shift in TTC attitude from 1998, and while there are changing attitudes this is balanced by a more rigorous model of propriety and normality. Attn to SEN generated concepts of social norms. Changes in attitude from bottom-up. While acknowledging that there is prejudice, this is more than balanced by appropriate "societies", and now workshops for educationalists. Negative reactions to SEN despite increasing demand. – "the division felt blocked". No major changes for a further 5 years (2008).	good", and no specific problem presents itself – though there is an awareness of changing attitudes (to SEN). But this is implicitly contradicted elsewhere – yet a positive view of SEN provision in Oman. Economic factors are the only problems (ie funding) education is "easy". For the teacher, interest > experience > IST > incentives (nationalist) Joint efforts with the MofH and MofE	idea. Discussion good. Implicit crit of bureaucracy yet also sense of inertia. Consequences of TT in the future a crucial matter, need to update TT curricula Acknowledged fear of community reactions – the reason for only partial incl or exclusion. Limits to teachers' awareness / the availability of SEN provision.
Strategies and policy / current issues / practicalities	Practical aspects improved – visits to specialist schools part of "theoretical courses" to cover "all types" of SEN, and learning diffs "tracked" to see how handled. Current lack of facilities – or serious research A careful introduction of	No clear curriculum or policy – trying to "promote" the psychological approach "and we find a problem". "Such matters" are dealt with or "touched on" "from time to time". Students not convinced that psychology curriculum along will help in SEN. Unfortunately, students in search of a	Early intervention and use of female teachers who are "willing to accept and understand" Use of seminars and new ideas to "redress" problems (elsewhere denied) as well as specialists in health and psychology	Small-scale amelioristic activities + access to more info. / role of school management + need to give teacher power (better TT and appropriate academics + linked courses) and develop a counselling policy

	SEN – not a shock – to generate a sense of a "positive role". Current programme inadequate – need to reconstruct entire TT curriculum rather than just add in SEN – need to look at practice elsewhere – SEN a subject for *all* TTCs. SEN challenge – a political platform of adjustment and reform outlined including wider involvement.	certificate rather than knowledge, there is no real communication with former TTC profs, and there are budgetary constraints, and low kudos of SEN work.		

ISSUES	BASMA	NAADER
Perception and categorization; the appearance of SEN; categories used	Female trainees perceived as more receptive and "willing to learn": a gender-based perception of SEN teaching. Parental role may be negative Importance of thorough / appropriate "diagnosis" to screen for any kind of disablility "even … partial disability": absolute categorization. Those with disabilities are categorized as having "problems" the causes need to be investigated. (The "disabled may have positive sides which we can make use of".) Perception that categorization starts with negative features – that the word "disabled" may have "negative repercussions" in terms of negative attitudes to those with SEN. Every disability unique – and may be more widespread. Teachers should "obtain knowledge especially about psychology" and "try to understand every stage of growth".	Terminology and thus ideology not understood: speaker suggests implicitly that he also doesn't understand; SEN = deviation from the norm "either positive or negative". Suggestion that SEN student perceived "sympathetically", and that they should be taught like others: a model of inclusion through insufficient knowledge / categorization. Temperamental/emotional features and mental features ("mild mental weakness") distinguished. Mild / severe categorization Autism described
Terminology and language	"Handling" various problems from "mild" to "poor". "Learning problems / problems in common sense / educational or psychological problems". Students may "suffer" from "poor hearing or mobility disabled". Medicalized model where SEN students have "symptoms". Acknowledged that there are "too many	SEN are "abnormal kids" whose problems can perhaps be overcome with assistance. Disability = "not normal" = having "some sort of deviation", whereas normal = "average".

	deviations" from "slight" upwards, and that these are demonstrated by "abnormal children"	"The normal child is the flawless child who has the aptitude and flair to learn without difficulty" – a strong sense of normal = superior, disablement = inferior. Temperamental/emotional features and mental features distinguished. Socializing problems (autism?) and disability "of the commonsense and memory".
Attitude / paradigms of practice / theory and SEN ideology / identity theory and concepts of gender and empowerment	SEN should be a subject "in every college" – a background in SEN vital in "handling" disabled students. SEN should be met at primary level. Things must not be left – otherwise "problems will get worse" and a student will "become a burden". SEN specialist in every school – an inclusive philosophy, in order to identify "find" those with SEN. Need for cooperation between those involved. Disablement positive only in social terms – ie is the personal "socially useful" (some arcane attitudes to teaching?) Integrative (or pseudo-inclusive) aspect to attitude – certainly not exclusive. The background for TTs in the 4th year inadequate. Need for specialist SEN groups and increased parental awareness to combat lack of awareness – role for media in increasing awareness and acceptance. Jobs and "social harmony" the aim of SEN teaching – importance of training.	Basic pathologized paradigm running from severe to mild disabilities. SE means care to adapt a child to the social norm – thus a theory of disability which means *adapting* "them" to be like "us". Large % dismissed – suggesting SEN not seen as urgent or part of general education. Teachers seen as the key to provision rather than equipment or facilities, the "desire" and "flair" are key skills: foreign systems of little use as models. Xenophobic attitude or aspect of the need to develop an Omani system for Omanis. SEN students valued through the potential contributions – but SEN not really understood as a category of need, just as part of a wider spectrum of differences. Levels of acceptance or rejection not considered important. Supports "gradual inclusion" according to size of disability ("severity"). Learning difficulties = studying retardation. Prefers personal paradigms rejects "foreign" ones.
Change and the future: social analyses	Need to obviate current problems of identification and earlier diagnosis, offer better student/teacher communication. Better TT earlier in the course. Recognition of pedagogic inadequacy. Need for funds. Role for the media Anxiety regarding parental role in socialization. The disabled "like foreigners", alien to their parents. Abuse and psychological problems. Social role in job creation – importance of	Community-centred problem rather than one of levels of appropriate provision. Need for "a dramatic change" in ESD – but this may not be "change" so much as a reversion to older models. Some workshops and lectures on specific problems (ie "aggressive children") point the way to the future. Teachers have little personal incentives and need to be better motivated – choosing the properly qualified teacher part of the crucial change.

	socialization. Genetic problems (inter-marriage) create some SEN, also wide disparity of awareness between regions, and denial of disability. "It is prohibited that any one [with disability] to enter school" (?)	Need to develop Omani rather than expat-based ID for teaching profession
Strategies and policy / current issues / practicalities	Issue of lack of parental cooperation – esp from female teachers – and poor TTC policy – imbalance of training and diagnosis. TT case study – to improve theory Practical issue of early ID and better environment (other practical rather that theoretical issues). Need to understand the causes of disability, and to involve families is diagnosis Issue of "invisible" disabilities ignored or covered up. Better awareness focussed at primary level + with involvement of parents. Any strategy contingent on availability of funds. Disabilities should be seen as potentially useful rather than a burden.	Lectures and directives from a revamped ESD rather than deeper policies on TT – though this then contradicted by the expressed need to graduate better qualified teachers. Desire to help SEN but gearing should be for "normal" students primarily – though need for an SEN-sensitive (rather than separate SEN) curriculum. A strategy of segregation for any SEN which is too difficult to fit into the educational system: change has to be for the benefit of the majority.

APPENDIX C

AIDE MEMOIRE FOR THE 2003 INTERVIEWS

Your experience and work

Can you tell me about your role in the department and its relationship to SEN? Do you bring up this issue in your teaching? What are the terms that you use?

Tell me about the current policy in your work place in regards to SEN (if any).

In general, to what extent do you see yourself, or your department, or academia as a whole open to understanding and serving SEN?

How would you describe the atmosphere in which you work? Are there any aspects which either hinder or help the provision of expertise to the teachers in this field?

Teacher training and SEN

What are, or how would you describe the strengths and weaknesses in the current teacher training programmes? Is there any need to change the programme?

What is your opinion about including SEN as part of the programme of teacher training?

In your opinion what is the best way to include SEN in the teacher training programme (for example, one year diploma after graduation, or four years' specialization, courses in the programme and so forth)?

What are the needs of students with SEN in your opinion?

What is the background needed by a teacher in an ordinary school regarding the provision of SEN?

Can you tell me of any experience of SEN known to you, any personal experience linked to SEN?

Do you think giving all teachers with an educational background in SEN would reflect positively on the ordinary and special schools? How?

Constructing an illustrative example

Fatimah – I would like to take you through a brief examination of a fictional character Fatimah, aged 8.

What would the reaction of the scholastic society be to someone like Fatimah?

An overall picture of SEN in Oman

Do you think that the topic of SEN is discussed in your work place? In what circumstances does is occur? Are people concerned? Are colleagues aware of concepts such as inclusion/exclusion/disability?

Can you give me an idea of the attitudes of those you teach? How would you describe their attitudes to concepts of SEN or specific practices such as inclusion/exclusion? Have their been changes in attitudes? Can you give examples?

In your opinion how do you find the reaction of your students in relation to topics on SEN?

How would you describe the attitudes of Omani society to those with SN? Has there been any change in such attitudes? How? Why?

Current and future developments

What changes are currently in the pipeline regarding SEN? How do you experience the implementation of any current changes?

Do you get any feedback from your students who have graduated and are teaching regarding SEN? For example, have they faced any situation with a SEN student?

Could you give me examples of workshops, seminars or conferences you attended inside or out of Oman? Were they useful? How?

Do you have any contacts with others in the field of SEN, especially those working outside Oman?

In SEN have you read anything recently or done any research possible beneficial to me in mine?

How do you see the future regarding the education of those with SEN? Will Fatimah be better served over the next five years? In your opinion, what are the future challenges that face SEN in Oman?

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A thesis presented for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy of the University of London
and the
Diploma of Imperial College
London 2005

LONDON UNIV